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VANITY UNDER THE SUN

By the same Author

ORDEAL
THE HAVEN
THE SENTIMENTALISTS

London
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VANITY UNDER THE SUN

BY

DALE COLLINS

". . . And I saw vanity under the sun."—*Ecclesiastes.*

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TO MY WIFE

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VANITY UNDER THE SUN

Vanity under the Sun

CHAPTER I

The two men washing at adjacent basins raised wet faces simultaneously and their eyes met in the long strip of mirror. As they put out their hands to take towels from the waiting Japanese boys their scrutiny was continued in a manner too absent-minded and impersonal to be rude. It was as if each saw the other as an unsubstantial creature shut-off in that crystal world—a mere shadow of humanity prisoned in a glass-fronted box of white and blue tiles.

Dr. Xavier Murphy smiled.

"Queer things, I always think: mirrors!" he remarked with a slight brogue. He was a small, sandy man whose high cheek-bones, flat nose, wide mouth and bright, inquisitive eyes gave him a somewhat simian appearance, which, however, was not unattractive. The monkey he resembled was an intelligent and petted creature of disarming quickness and sagacity.

"Yes," the other agreed with a nod, addressing the stranger behind the mirror and welcoming the advance while rather surprised to hear the figure speak. "Yes—something of the same idea had just struck me."

Dr. Murphy, drying his thin beard, was interested as a matter of course. His restless mind concerned

itself with the surface of everything with which it came in contact and its workings were never delayed by deep thought—an ill-disciplined gossip of a mind, lacking concentration but with an insatiable appetite for fleeting impressions and a tiresome capacity for response to the reactions which arose. It was busy as ever at the moment.

A business-man suffering from nerve exhaustion, he decided. Some people pretended to read the lines in the palm of the hand—a benighted, heathenish superstition. But reading the lines in this face was another matter. They told their story so graphically that one would have needed to be blind not to have understood. It was the story of a life of strain and effort. The lines were deeply etched, puckering the corners of the eyes, searing the somewhat baggy lids, spouting in a little fountain between the brows, cutting from nostrils to mouth and prolonging the lips. As the towel passed over the skin they were smoothed out momentarily but immediately sprang back again, sharp and set.

The face inclined to length and thinness, but the strength of the slightly hooked nose and the firmness of the jaw gave it distinction and power. With crisp, slightly-grizzled hair and fatigued grey eyes which seemed to have retreated back into his head in an attempt to escape the strain of constant vigilance, he looked well advanced into middle-age, but Dr. Murphy guessed him to be nearer thirty than forty. For his height he should have been broader; his figure suggested neglect—the framework was there; the flesh had crumbled in because the body had been treated merely as a working machine.

These ambitious, greedy men!—how they drove themselves, mused Dr. Murphy. A vision of the City flashed through his brain. He saw it as a place of mystery, conflict, monotony and inexplicable interests and concerns. Words and phrases recurred to him —contango . . . inflation . . . gold standard . . . nitrates . . . bulls . . . bears . . . hammering. . . . The quick fingers of his mind touched each and flung it away to snatch at the next. Contango?—brokers in top hats dancing together to Spanish music. . . . And which were bulls and which were bears?—and why were they either? He saw the dimly remembered Bank and Stock Exchange and the pigeons. He saw the narrow, crowded streets which seemed so unworthy of their famous names.

This fellow wasn't well or happy in soul or body. Life had made big demands on him—still did so. He was travelling for his health, frightened by a sudden discovery of what an unfair proportion of his allotted energy he had burned up. Perhaps he would be worth cultivating from a professional point of view. But Dr. Murphy could not control his thoughts long enough to be really material. It was one of his handicaps. Well, this fellow had piled up money and power no doubt, but at what a price!

He straightened up, ran a stub of comb through his beard, arranged his tie and remarked briskly: "Ah, that's better! Very muggy and unpleasant, isn't it?" The other agreed, adding that heat played up with him, that most things did.

There were times when Dr. Murphy mourned superficially over wasted opportunities, but this meeting quickened a comfortable sense of wisdom. After

all, a lot could be said for taking life at an easy pace. It ended in death for rich or poor, for great or humble. Just as well, then, not to batter oneself to pieces en route. He wasn't rich like this fellow, but he wasn't lined like him either.

"You're a stranger to Yokohama, of course?" he asked with that flattering suggestion of interest which always evoked a friendly response.

"Yes, I only landed this morning, though my ship got in yesterday. I've not even registered—simply called in at the bank on my way up. I stayed aboard until just before she sailed answering cables and getting off mail. A real holiday's hard to come by these days. They can get hold of you too easily. I say, how much should I give this chap?"

He held out a handful of change. His fingers were long, flat-tipped and furrowed at each joint. They trembled.

"One of those is ample," said Dr. Murphy, indicating a two *sen* piece. "They don't thank you if you give them too much and it's bad for us locals. You pass on but we remain." The tips were given, and they were helped into their coats. "I'm Xavier Murphy, by way of being one of Yokohama's medicoes. Perhaps, as you're a visitor, you'd allow me to offer the hospitality of a drink? And I may be able to help you in other ways—no doubt you'll want some golf—anything I can do——!"

"That's very good of you, doctor. I'm glad we met—in the mirror, eh? My name's Emmet—George Emmet. When one's travelling alone it's good to meet friendly people."

"And that's what we Irish are, though you English

would never recognise it," chuckled Dr. Murphy. "Come along, the bar's this way." The boys, drawing hissing breaths, bowed them out.

Cards were exchanged. Dr. Murphy glanced at the one he had received. So this fellow was a knight, eh? Sir George Emmet. He had guessed aright then in putting him down as successful. A big business-man with a wartime title. And clever, too, but very exhausted.

"I suppose it's about twelve?—my watch is still on ship's time," Sir George Emmet was saying.

The doctor looked at his. "A quarter to."

"Then if you're not in a hurry I'd like to wait until twelve sharp. I have to go carefully in the matter of drinks. You see, I'm only allowed three a day, so I take them at regular hours." These fellows loved their regular hours, said Dr. Murphy's busy mind, and they ate and drank far too much as a general rule. They took port after heavy lunches. . . . How ever did they keep awake in the afternoons? "I have one at twelve, one at seven and one at eleven before I turn in—on the tick. Only way. Doctor's orders——!" Irritation was in his flat voice. Dr. Murphy knew his tongue was wearied with much snapping out of orders to cringing subordinates. Well, no doubt these fellows enjoyed it, but it would not have suited him.

"Ah," he replied, "what people we doctors are—martinets, tyrants. But if you *will* carry on until we have you at our mercy what can you expect, Sir George?"

They passed through the swing doors into the bar while the newcomer was answering. He spoke with

his lips turned down at the corners in something between a smile and a wry grimace, as if he had a bitter taste in his mouth.

"The machine runs down, I suppose. It must. Can't go on for ever. Do you know this is the first holiday I've ever had!"

The announcement was made with martyred pride.

"Holy Saints, I don't envy you!" It was no wonder these people got on, but what a price!—what a price!

"No—you needn't," said Emmet, and again irritation showed in his brief, nervous gesture. But it was evident, also, that he liked this affable, sharp Dr. Murphy, and, with the egotism of the nerve sufferer, welcomed the opportunity to discuss himself. "Think of it—year in and year out at a pressure you can't imagine." He pursed his tight lips and shook his head. "No, you can't imagine it. My firm's one of the biggest engineering concerns in England. My father founded it. He died. The job fell to me when I was still a child almost. It got me. It ate me up. Then when things were well in hand at last the war came. *That* meant work, if you like. And afterwards the collapse and the need to keep things going and pull round. We did it. We did it better than any of them, and sooner. But it meant work, I tell you. I got a reputation. I had a market value. Companies which were reorganising amid the clamour of shareholders put me on their Boards and their shares jumped the moment the announcement was made. Those shares stayed up. Because I worked. I had to. It was my pride. I wouldn't let them down. But it got too big. I took

on too much. Ambition, I suppos e. But there was the work and I knew I could do it. And I have worked —God, I have!"

"No doubt!—remarkable!" This man while aweing Dr. Murphy, gave him, also, a sense of delightful indolence. He leaned back luxuriously on the bar, and his voice sounded even slower and more leisurely than it really was. "I admire you people who can throw yourselves into things like that. For myself I am naturally idle. But you keep things seething so." He made a gesture like an idle cook stirring a pot. "Yes, I admire the spirit, but I'm glad I haven't it. It's a menace to peace of mind and comfort." His wide grin breaking suddenly transformed the statement into a compliment.

Emmet's smile of acknowledgment was brief and spiritless, an effort in the cause of politeness.

"I see what you're getting at and at this moment I'm inclined to agree with you," he said. "Of course, I'm done up. I've had too much work, though it's the only thing I've ever really enjoyed. But I made a glutton of myself, and gluttony, like any other habit, takes breaking off. I couldn't work any more, and yet I can't play. Damned if I know, but I think this spell's going to make it worse than ever for me." He broke off, suddenly shamefaced. "Look here, I must apologise. I've only known you for a matter of minutes and I'm telling you the whole history of my 'case.' It's a tribute to you in a professional sense, I suppose, but really——!" Dr. Murphy smiled encouragement. The other needed nothing more. "A doctor's always a doctor, isn't he?"

"Surely," said Dr. Murphy.

"I've been bottling all this up and it's good to be able to talk about it again. Tell me honestly, don't you think the voyage out should have put me on my feet?" His fingers drummed on the bar, his face looked longer and the greyness of his eyes seemed to deepen. There was an invisible foe at his shoulder.

A change came over Dr. Murphy. He put on a fatherly, professional manner. He might have been a parish priest.

"You must remember you've a lot of leeway to make up, Sir George. You can't expect to be restored to health simply by buying a steamer ticket. You've not got off the treadmill at all yet. But Japan's a wise choice I should think. Take my advice and get away from the cities—they're only like our manufacturing towns in fancy dress. The people in them have swallowed forty centuries of civilization in about as many years, and they've got mental indigestion. Get up to Miyanoshita first. You'll find good golf there and you can sit and look at Fuji for a week or so. That'll calm down your hustle. Then work your way right off the tourist tracks. Oh, yes, if you handle Japan in the right way it'll make a new man of you."

"I don't know," said Emmet moodily. "I don't know. I certainly hope so. Just now I feel as if I simply couldn't face all that back there ever again. I wonder how I've had the nerve to do what I've done. It looks an impossible proposition at this range. I should never have come so far away. Why couldn't they have simply sent me to Biarritz? Or why couldn't they have let the wife and kids come

with me? This business is lonely. It gives you too much time to think—you get too wide an angle on what's waiting for you when you go back. I've an idea it'd have paid me better to stay in harness."

"And die in it?"

"Oh, I'd have kept going somehow. You don't know how blown you are until you stop." His tone changed abruptly. He broke out with passion: "It's all you damned doctors—sorry for the language, but it's a fact. You're the only people who've ever bossed me around in my life, you're the only people whose orders I've ever taken—and a nice mess you've made! Why, I'm terrified of the whole lot of you, and I'm not joking when I say that. You order us to do this, that and the other and we have to obey. Hell!—look at me, forty-one and should be as strong as a horse, but here I am waiting until twelve before I can have a drink even though I'm on holiday."

Dr. Murphy knew these cases. He did not trouble to argue, but glancing at the clock, remarked cheerfully: "Anyway, that's only a matter of minutes. Let's forget doctors and work and everything and talk about something more pleasant. What will you have?—the boys can be getting them ready."

Emmet's attempt to brighten up at the prospect failed because even the drinks allowed him were spoilt by irksome restraint.

"I wonder can they mix a cocktail here?"

"Of course—!" said the resident, hurt. "An American I was entertaining only last week said he'd never tasted a better than the one the head boy mixed."

"Good! I like a cocktail, and another of these Americans on the ship coming out introduced me to a very fine one. It had rum as its basis. Would they have any Bacardi rum, d'you think?"

"I should say so," Dr. Murphy began. He was standing facing Emmet, his back against the bar, his arms spread out along it, the heel of one foot resting on the brass rail, his small and bearded face revealing ready interest in this exotically named drink. Bacardi rum: pirates . . . Dead Man's Chest . . . The white jacketed boys, their hair glossy and black, awaited the order. No other patrons were in the bar. The workaday noises of the outer world floated in: the tinkle of a ricksha bell and the warning Hi! of the runner, the click-clack of sandals, the slur of feet, and cry of a hawker, noises of shipping from the harbour. "Bacardi rum—oh yes!" Dr. Murphy repeated, tasting the word.

He was about to turn and give the order when there was a sharp, sustained rattle of sound, like the passing of a string of heavy trucks, accompanied by a slight swaying motion. The hands of the clock stood at three minutes to noon. Dr. Murphy was startled, but mastered himself and remarked with something of the air of a showman: "A 'shake'! Don't be alarmed. Nothing in it. It'll pass. We often——"

Another louder roar came, another more violent trembling.

A tremendous blow was delivered at the building from the ground below. The floor bulged up and crumpled. The clock leapt from the wall like a round-faced, terrified animal. The bar reeled and

pitched. Bottles tumbled from the shelves while the mirrors behind splintered. For an awful moment only the human beings were still in that place. They were frozen. Dr. Murphy clutched the edge of the bar without moving his position, in his eyes dismay, his mouth roundly open behind his beard.

A heavy electric fan crashed down from the ceiling. It struck the back of his neck, and broke his spine. He remained upright momentarily as if braced against Death's incredible onslaught.

Upon Emmet's brain was printed an ineffaceable picture of the man with whom he had been talking, dead, seeming to hang there now, crucified.

Chaos closed in. The room was dissolving about him. Incredibly, a normal, substantial, accepted setting was smashing to pieces. Clamour reverberated in his ears. Through clouds and streams of mortar and dust, through falling timber and rubble he beheld dimly, with wild eyes, walls, ceiling and floor bending, caving, rushing to meet each other.

A thought flashed into his mind; the end of the world! . . .

He was flung off his feet, and rolled blindly without hope or objective for the idea of escape did not occur to him. This was inevitable; this was the end. A sheet of plaster smashed down on him, splintered into powder, and filled his mouth with grit. A heavy lounge tumbled forward, and he found himself beneath it. The edge caught on an armchair, and wedged there. He lay in darkness, as if under a low, ridged roof. Beams and girders subsided this way and that across it, taking the weight as the building shuddered down. His throat and lungs were choked,

his eyes burned as though hot coals were pressed to them, his head was a dull mass of pain.

The world tossed and swayed so that it seemed the solid ground had become fluid and uneasy as the sea. Nausea swept up in him, and he was sick, lying heedlessly on his face. The picture of the little doctor-man, crucified, continued to blaze in his consciousness as the symbol of all calamity. Crucified and dead. He, too, was dead, though he still supported the ruins of the universe upon his breaking back, and heard in an uproar of something louder than sound the pandemonium of the bursting globe.

For a space—nothing.

A gleam of light, like the coming of dawn, was filtering palely through the tumbled confusion of wreckage. It must have been there for a long time, because, even as he became aware of it, he had already made up his mind to reach it. The manner in which the decision had been made was not clear. Nothing was clear. He did not know where he was nor what had happened.

Every atom of his being which remained alive had concentrated on winning to that gleam. He found he was wriggling on his stomach from beneath the couch and out into the labyrinth. Dust poured on him, but the mass did not move, supporting itself in semi-rigidity. His bare hands pulled and thrust, forcing a narrow path. Desperation drove him on, though with every breath the certainty grew that before he drew another he was doomed to bring the whole mountain down. The back of his neck ached and pulsed, as if at the first light touch of that pressure which would crush flesh, blood and

bone into a dark stain lost eternally amid the debris.

His nerves quivered to the expectation: Now? . . . Surely he had gone too far, dared too much? But only the torrents of fragments smothered him. Another slight advance. Now? . . . He held his breath, the scream of death struggling in his throat. The mass disdained to annihilate him, leaving his extinction to the riff-raff. Sheer surprise at his continued success overwhelmed him for a time, but after a brief respite, the stubborn human spirit awoke again.

Clawing aside a bunch of stiff canvas and broken, gilded wood which had once been a picture, he saw beyond a clear space. The air was slightly fresher. He drew deep draughts into his labouring lungs. A section of white wall confronted him, rising in isolation like a lone tooth. In it was a big window, the lower pane of which had gone while the upper had escaped without so much as a crack. The way to escape lay clear, but as he saw it he realised, also, that he could go no further. No further . . . he was so weary.

The noise of another human being panting and struggling close at hand aroused him like a trumpet. He had been lonely and lost; now he had found a comrade. He wished to greet this fellow conqueror with a shout of triumph, but his voice had gone. Staggering up he lurched through the window into the outer world.

The earth shivered again. A cry, the terror in which thrust into his senses like a hot blade, made him spin about.

In a shrouded frame he saw a horror, clear-cut and complete. Not a yard away one of the bar-boys —tattered, eyes starting, a mad thing—was leaping after him through the window. The act was apart from time; it persisted, permanent and final. The great sheet of glass above had been dislodged. It continued to slice down; the boy seemed to await the stroke, hands flung out in agonised appeal. Emmet stared into his face. The glass, like a guillotine, caught the stooped figure beneath the shoulder blades . . .

Blood ran hot in Emmet's hair, on his face, on his hands which had sought to ward off the sight. It was sticky. His own mingled with that of the Japanese, for flying daggers of glass had gashed him. He tore off his drenched coat, flung it away, and fled, reeling, heedless of direction, lost to reason.

A fierce gale whooped and shrieked, tossing the pall of dust and smoke into chimeric shapes so that the world was a hideous playground of dragons darting fiery tongues and lashing destroying wings Emmet was in what had been a street but had become a wilderness of fantastic hills, craters and valleys flung up in confusion from the reeking ruins of the city. About him poured torrents of humanity from whom rose a babel of cries, lamentations and groans. Coolies in blue suits boldly patterned with white, men in black kimonos with cloth caps pulled down about their ears, women like storm-beaten butterflies, an occasional foreigner running with a fixed purpose which was distinctive—all these, mingled with horses and cattle, surged around Emmet, but he saw them not. The turmoil was too great to be absorbed. It

deadened, deafened, blinded; it was a nightmare tapestry woven from threads too terrible for the details of the pattern to remain distinct to finite human senses.

Jostled and jostling he went on. Once a building slipped down at his side, expiring amid a rattling volley of explosions. Emmet only knew the noise was louder. The air was foul and hot. Soot and sparks fell everywhere to be lifted up again and whirled into renewed dances. Panic was fanned by the raving wind.

The remains of a wagon barred his path. He saw the bull which had drawn it crushed between the shafts like rotten fruit. As he scrambled down the other side a figure rushed up to him—a blackened phantom of a man. They collided. Emmet found his shoulders seized by savage and frantic fingers.

"My wife—? Where? Where?" the shape jibbered into his face.

Emmet pummelled him, beating him off.

"Don't know! Don't know!"

While he struggled for freedom the man flung him aside and, shouting childish abuse, vanished into the smoke.

Incidents occurred without purpose or meaning. Order and sanity had been killed. A dog sat howling, its nose pointed up at the black sky. He kicked it viciously out of the way, and left it running in circles, snarling and foaming. With the intention of robbery or from madness, a Japanese sprang suddenly at him and thrust an arm about his throat. He bit the flesh with his teeth. His assailant yelped, released him, passed. There was no sense of a lapse of time

between these events. They were, and they were over. He had no power to grapple with them, to be afraid, to feel. For intervals he was only aware of movement. Or, again, trifles disintegrated from the rest and, for no apparent reason, stood out darkly. Thus, through all else, he listened to the shrill, mad screams of a horse in anguish, until, after what seemed ages, they were silenced. The relief was so intense that he almost believed peace had been restored everywhere.

But although the main collapse was over further tremors continued to bring ruin to more utter ruin, and explosions and fires still sundered and devoured.

A shopkeeper or a pillager fled past carrying a roll of scarlet silk, the end of which had come undone so that he trailed a broad streamer of blood. Emmet, without knowing why, jumped upon it and stood firm. The man halted, faced about and chattered like an infuriated ape. Emmet shook his fist at him, but the other jerked his prize free. Emmet ran on.

Soft things at which he dared not look gave and squelched oozily as his feet pressed on them. The dead—all the dead! The words beat like a pulse in his head. But he did not care. When the living blundered into him he punched at them with bleeding fists, and they retaliated. And yet they awakened neither hatred nor pity in him.

A food-vendor's stall had collapsed across the road, and Emmet slipped on the souplike mess of *noodles*. He fell on his back, and remained so. No reason presented itself for rising. He closed his eyes. A sharp pressure hurt his chest and was removed. He looked up, irritated. A woman in European

clothes had stood upon him, as if he had been one of those squelching dead people. She was in a short white frock, and the fact that she carried a tennis racquet filled him with bitterness. The selfishness of it! A tennis racquet . . . and standing on him! As she hurried on he heard her crying: "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

The word brought a freshet of strength. It would not do to be caught by the fire and burned up—it would not do at all. that was sound logic. He stumbled to his feet, and his aching muscles carried him forward. But, presently, he was checked again. He had come upon a sewing machine. It stood upright, like an island, in a flood of masonry which had once been a warehouse. Clean, untouched, its polished wheel shining, it remained as a survival of a sober world. He gazed at it as if trying to remember where he had seen such a thing before, reading the maker's name and seeing the foolish scrolls of flowers plated on it. Yes, a sewing-machine, he thought. But, remembering the fire, he glanced over his shoulder and beheld flames leaping hundreds of feet into the air and shutting out the sky with their red walls which the gale lifted high and higher, drove down again, destroyed, re-built.

He ran away from the fire.

A blind beggar, horribly pock-marked, took shape, mewing, helpless on his knees. From some corner of Emmet's mind sprang an echo: Assist the blind, please! But he dared not pause, and raced by, vaguely shocked at the cruelty of what he did. Assist the blind, please! The horror of it arrested his feet. He could not abandon the dreadful creaure to the

fire. He looked back. The man was no longer to be seen, and he could not tell where he had left him. There was nothing familiar about the vista, no land mark; it was a black kaleidescope of shifting misery and terror.

A distinct wave, accompanied by renewed thunder, surged along the street. He felt it pass beneath him. A five-storeyed wall, alone and thin like a piece of scenery and punctured with staring, empty windows, swayed and blew up, like a bomb, in a sulphurous cloud. He watched numbly. The air cleared a little. No wall now. It came to him that had he been fifty yards further on—had he not stopped to look for the beggar—the life would have been smashed out of him. This fancy made him laugh, because it was silly to think of being killed when one was dead.

He laughed and laughed. The tears streamed down his grimy cheeks.

People bumped into him and dashed on, leaving him to his mirth, but one—a man in a straw hat and carrying a portable typewriter and a brief bag—paused for a second.

"Don't laugh!" urged a cracked, shrill voice, "y'll go mad!" He gave Emmet an impatient pushing knock with the typewriter. "Run that way, silly—boats!" He did not wait, but acted on his own advice. Emmet followed him. Assist the blind! Boats!

A fit of sneezing cleared his head, but immediately he was in thick, greasy smoke again. By the roadside a row of stalls blazed. The acrid yet oily smell of burning human flesh oozed up his nostrils, convulsing his empty stomach. His hair crimped up with the

heat. A bright thing spun giddily before his eyes. He blinked and gaped. It was a woman, her kimono blazing. He covered his ears against the excruciating pain of her cries, and when he looked again she had gone, like a big spark caught up in the arms of the exulting wind.

An hiatus of unknown length was closed by the discovery of a baby crawling in the road—a Japanese doll dressed in a diminutive, flowered kimono, with a a cropped head and black, slanted eyes. Mechanically he picked up the child, who clung to him and moaned. But, after a space, he found the extra weight had taken his breath and he had to rest. Sitting down between the wheels of an overturned ricksha he laid the babe on the ground at his side. When he had recovered sufficiently to force himself to move he forgot it completely, and rambled away without the slightest knowledge of desertion.

Horrors repeated themselves in a thousand variations. Havoc ran with him; death was all about; fire drove him on. A change broke suddenly: emptiness lay before. He had come out on the Bund, and beyond was the harbour beneath weaving fogs of smoke. He found his way over warm and tumbled blocks of concrete to the sea where he joined a great multitude who wept and clung together, or wrung their hands, or pointed in anguish to the holocaust of their homes.

The water sucked in and out, not in waves but as if the tide ebbed and flowed with every minute. It was yellow and sinister. As the fires grew the stones on the shore were heated so that with each inrush clouds of steam arose. The very sea burned, for

great patches of oil blazed on its surface. Docks and wharves were lines of scarlet. Ships' sirens keened and tugs hooted where, far out, vast shadows moved. Wreckage washed about. Lighters drifted among the throng dealing battering blows. On the Bluff, houses in the European settlement were beacons set in a lost and higher heaven.

The people were paralysed. They huddled together. The dishevelled, mired, lost ghost of Sir George Emmet found a way among them, moving with a stubborn but purposeless persistence, as unconscious of what he did as a somnambulist. The salt-water ate into his wounds and into the cracks the heat had made in his skin. He did not feel pain. The annihilation of Yokohama, written in letters of fire and dread across earth, sea and sky, meant nothing to him. His heart continued to beat, his lungs to breathe—that was all.

The side of a ship's boat pressed against his chest. Boats? Someone had said that long ago . . . There were many people. He fell limply, bent almost double across the gunwale.

A rough voice miles away shouted: "Hey, Bill, pull that poor bastard in-board. He's hacked to bits. Have to take him. But no more. Shove her off. No! No! No! We'll be back!"

The voice was still saying No! No! No! in answer to piping clamour. He heard the smack of his own feet falling on wood, his head struck something hard, and then the night shut down, black, complete and cool.

CHAPTER II

EMMET awoke and lay aching. His brain felt bruised, and he could not think. Gradually the realisation grew that he had been ill—very ill—but he could not remember what the trouble was nor how it had come upon him. A sudden stroke, perhaps—a mental collapse. The pains in his head suggested that. And he wasn't better yet. He was so weary. The problem of what had happened was too difficult; he gave it up and lapsed back into unconsciousness for a time. Then he began to wonder where he was. A sense of motion and a smell of paint and the sea brought him slowly to the knowledge that he was on a ship. The fact required laborious consideration.

His eyes were shut. That was foolish. He was puzzling in the darkness when all he had to do was to open them. But they would not open. The lids were heavy as lead. Mustering his forces he made another effort, and saw an iron roof studded with bolts and painted with white which had flakes in it like the coconut in the icing of a cake. It was very close. He shut his eyes quickly, fearing it would fall and crush him. But it did not. Turning on his side to avoid seeing the roof again, he surveyed his surroundings.

The cabin gleamed whitely in the pale light which was subdued and given a touch of green at intervals as a wave slapped over the port. The glasses in the rack above the washstand clinked, and clothes on

hooks behind the door swayed with the ship's movements. Through everything ran the steady pulsations of the engines. A shoe rolled drunkenly on the strip of faded carpet. The sizzling noise of the waters and the creaking of frame and woodwork kept up a constant chorus.

Emmet's consternation increased.

Seeking enlightenment he peered about and learned that he was not alone. A bed had been made up on the settee which ran off at right angles from the lower bunk, and in it a man reclined. For a moment Emmet could not understand why this man appeared abnormal, and then he saw that it was because his head seemed to have been fitted to the wrong body. Beneath the blanket showed the curves of a great stomach and big limbs while the face was haggard, pale and peaked. The hands and arms were swathed in bandages, and he wore a white turban of lint. His eyes were closed, but his expression betrayed that he was troubled.

Shyness—a sense of being at a disadvantage through the cloudy emptiness of his mind—chained Emmet's tongue, but curiosity had to be satisfied. Instead, however, of the casual phrase calculated to enlighten him without revealing that he was not quite well yet, he heard himself calling urgently in a husky croak: "I say—! I say—!"

The man sat up and considered him with popping eyes in which glowed malicious lights.

"Ah, you've come to life again, have you?" he demanded with unfriendly satisfaction. "They were beginning to figure you never would. Well, what do *you* think about it?"

The words and the snarl with which they were spoken distressed Emmet. He could not answer.

"Bit at sea, eh?—in every sense," the other continued, enjoying Emmet's embarrassment. "Well, you're not the only sufferer, so you needn't look for sympathy. There are thousands been through just as bad as you—me, for instance!"

The sagging lips curled into a sneer. Emmet's discomfort increased. It was obvious this stranger laboured under a grievance with which he was connected.

"But what——?" he asked weakly.

"Ah, so you've forgot, have you? Memory gone, eh? Well, they thought all along your mind would be knocked sideways. You ought to consider yourself lucky. To forget, eh? God, I wish I could forget!" This speech cut deeply into Emmet's consciousness which was sensitive and receptive after long inaction. The man below took his injured right hand in the crook of his left arm and nursed it, rocking about with the ship. "Yes, better be balmy than sane. You're not so badly off. What about me? I'm ruined and done for, but I can remember. You don't need sympathy. I envy you. But what about me? Oh, you may try to despise me for marrying a Jap, but she was better than your damned whites and I played fair by her. The baby coming like that in the middle of it and me seeing them both burned before my eyes!—think of that, will you? The baby born too soon . . . my wife . . . the fire! How can *you* expect sympathy?" He made moaning sounds, swaying his heavy body from side to side. "Think of it! And me burning my hands actually trying to pull

them out of the flames. The flames came along, I tell you, quick as a wave. I tried to pull them out with my hands—here!" He held out his bandages. "And the baby just born—dead? God knows! But burned up anyway!" He rocked more violently. "Yes! Yes! Yes!" he affirmed repeatedly.

A chill tide of misery stole over the listener, for although the meaning of the words evaded him delicate fibres were pricked. The baby had been born in the middle of it. The middle of what?—something horrible! This man envied him because he had forgotten. What terrible thing had he forgotten? He shuddered.

"Yes," the speaker whined on, "it didn't drive me mad. Should have, but that's what comes of having strength of mind. Strength of mind enough to go your own way—to marry the woman you wanted to, Jap or what—and now to come through that and remember every bit! Sympathy? What about me? Rich a week ago. She owned a fine lot of property—those damned paper houses that burn quicker'n tinder. Every penny in them. Nothing now—no wife, no baby, no houses. All gone—poof!" He blew an imaginary cloud of smoke up at Emmet.

"But what——?" asked Emmet again, fearfully.

The man hesitated, and then, nodding with a sudden fierce determination, burst out: "Why should you be allowed to forget? I can't—why should you? Oh, I'll remind you quick enough since you're so anxious. Listen to me: Yokohama—half Japan—has been wrecked, smashed to bits, finished, by earthquake and fire. Nobody knows yet how many thousands were burned and crushed and smothered. You

just think now for a bit—think of buildings you'd expect to last for ever coming down like houses of cards, and black smoke everywhere, and flame right up the sky, and the stink, and the wind—wh-e-e-ew! —and the solid earth rocking like this damned sea. You just think of that!"

Emmet, obediently, was thinking. Panic and sickness gripped him as the words possessed his brain.

"Yes," he said, dully. "Yes. Where am I?"

"On a relief ship—the *Mithridates*. You been aboard the *Empress of Australia* for two days dead as a log. Now you're transhipped and on your way to Kobe. Kobe escaped. Fancy the luck of people who lived in Kobe!" The voice rose in a wail of envy. "The luck—! They'll never understand what we been through. Nobody ever will. The people at home'll read about it in their papers and they'll say: 'I see there's been an earthquake in Japan.' The King'll send a cable to the Emperor saying how sorry he is about the earthquake. But it'll be so far away that a fat lot of real sympathy we'll get from them —the swine. Earthquake be damned! Hell, I tell you, hell!"

Emmet's head stirred restlessly on the pillows.

"Yes," he agreed. "Yes. Hell! I saw a mad dog and there was a horse neighing—ugh! I saw a Japanese cut in two by a window and a woman running all on fire—"

"That wasn't her," the angry voice broke in. "It wasn't, I tell you. She couldn't run. Haven't I said she'd just had the baby. Think of it—a baby born with the blazing house falling down. Oh, you needn't think you're going to get any sympathy from

me. Now I hope you're happy. I've made you remember all right, haven't I?"

There was no reply. Emmet had closed his eyes. The horror through which he had passed had returned. He was beneath its shadow as a man waking in the night may find himself still sweating in the grip of a dream. He could not bear to look upon the dark pictures in his mind. The malignant flow of words went on, flogging him to remember.

"You think I'm going to sympathise with you, but what about the things I saw? My home going up, poof!—like smoke. Act of God—? Act of me foot! God?—oh, don't make me laugh!" But he did, with ghastly cacklings. Emmet remembered, dimly, having laughed like that once. "And I tell you I saw a block of concrete must have weighed a ton fall on the only foreigner in Yokohama who'd really stayed my friend. Old Jimmie—! It crushed him flat as a piece of paper. I tell you, I saw——"

A new voice intruded. It was coarse and thick, and came from the lower berth accompanied by the sound of heavy fists beating on the mattress.

"For Christ's sake stop yer gab!" the unseen shouted. "Isn't it bad 'nough for me to be here wi' both me legs broke without you nagging and ranting 'bout what *you've* seen and all the sympathy *you* need. May you rot, I say—waking up a man wi' his legs paining this way. Serves you right for living in the stinking country—serves you right! But if a man can't go ashore for a few hours after stoking all the way round from New York—if he can't go ashore without getting his legs broke—well, I ask

you? And but for Maggie I'd never have shipped again, curse her!"

"You won't get no sympathy from me," came the maddening parrot-cry from the settee. "Not a drop. And I wasn't talking to you. I was telling that fellow up there. He'd forgot."

"I know. I been listening, haven't I? You're ratty and so you want to drive him ratty. You heard the doctor say he might be mad, and you're all out to scare him into it. One lunatic's bad 'nough, thanks. And b' the Sailor, if you don't shut your jaw I'll shut it for you some way, broke legs and all!"

They continued to wrangle, but Emmet was no longer listening. The dread of the past had been replaced by the sharper dread of the present. He did not want to remember now, but he wanted to be sure he was sane. The doctor had said he might be mad. How could he tell whether he was or not? Certainly his head hurt and he felt lost and fogged, but his mind was all right. He would have to take a grip, and recall everything at any cost.

He lifted himself on his elbow, and, through the wordy brawling, spoke with a desperate attempt at clarity.

"I remember," he declared, "I remember the whole thing. I saw a man—the little doctor fellow—crucified. I remember——"

But he found no more to say, and his jaw dropped. For a second he remained staring at the fat man with the thin face and then fear mastered him and he knew that he must flee back into the sanctuary of blankness until he was stronger and could demonstrate to them that he was sane. The doctor might

come! . . . A shiver ran through him. His head fell back and he escaped into oblivion.

"Ah, he's gone off again," announced the man on the settee. "But he gets no sympathy from me."

The sufferer in the lower berth moaned in impotent wrath, protesting to heaven against the restraining bonds of his broken legs.

CHAPTER III

Face turned to the ship's side, Emmet was playing the eavesdropper at another of those painful and distressing duologues in which, as usual, he heard himself discussed with as much candour and impersonalness as if he had been a corpse. The exchanges took place between Sir and Briggs—two characters whom he had never seen. But he hated them both. On previous occasions when he had listened to them they had terrified and numbed him, but to-day he felt stronger and instead of being afraid was challenged to the conflict. If they had only known, he chuckled silently, how he had trapped them and how well he was laying his plans to defeat their evil purposes!

There could be no doubt that his weakness had to be concealed from these enemies. If they discovered it they would use it to his detriment. Care and cunning were called for in dealing with people to whom he was no more than an inanimate object of no account. In some inexplicable way he had returned to life with the gift of freedom, and he had no intention of allowing them to wrest it from him. Apart from these considerations it would have been humiliating, almost indecent, to reveal his secret to outsiders, exposing himself as a creature incomplete, imperfect and feeble, as well as open to attack. He had some pride still, he hoped.

All this became delightfully clear while he lay still. His confidence increased. The project could be carried through. Had he not already gained the

initial victory by becoming the unsuspected spy at their councils? They thought they were very clever, but already he was tricking them.

They were going all over the old ground again in their heavy, callous way.

"It's a peculiar case, Briggs, and, frankly, outside my experience. But there's nothing more we can do. The only remedy is Time—that may repair the damage caused by the shock."

"But you don't think it's likely to be able to do that altogether, in a manner of speaking, sir?" Briggs, as ever, was obsequious, an underling in the conspiracy. His question was merely a peg for Sir's use.

"I'm afraid there is that risk, Briggs. I only hope I'm proved wrong, but a shock to the nervous system sufficiently great to render a man unconscious for so long may very easily leave some ill-effect."

"He might be mad I suppose, sir?" Emmet heard in this inquiry morbid interest and gloating anticipation.

An angry stirring from the settee announced that the fat man with the thin face was listening peevishly, but the duologue continued without interruption.

"He might be, Briggs."

"And in that event, sir—if I may ask?"

"Why, we'll simply have to turn him over to the authorities at Kobe. I don't know much about this God-forsaken country, but I suppose they'll have mental homes where whites can be sent. Anyway, of course, we'll have to get him off our hands. He can't stay aboard indefinitely."

"Oh, of course not, sir," Briggs hastened to agree.

"We've done our duty by him, sir, if I may put that opinion."

The dispassionate and hypocritical cruelty of his foes enraged Emmet so that he could have wept. They regarded him simply as an encumbrance, a piece of rubbish to be shot anywhere, willy-nilly, as long as they were rid of it. But he was too clever to weep. He had embarked on a fight for something dear as life itself: liberty. In that cause he would use all his powers wisely and well. Having won through a dreadful trial he was not going to find himself worse off than ever. They maliciously assumed—they hoped—that he was mad. What grounds had they for doing so? None! He would show them. Here was his brain working more smoothly and strongly than it ever had before, working with the precision of a watch.

But infinite care was needed. Sir, no doubt, was a doctor, and doctors, he knew, were dangerous people associated with terrible events. They took the control of your life out of your hands, brushing aside protests with suave insolence and threats. This doctor could, and would if given the chance, lock him up in some place full of mad Japanese just to get rid of him. But Emmet was as sane as a man could be and, provided he hid the secret, could wreck any plot against the treasure of freedom which he had won in some fashion forgotten for a while.

Now for action—! He thrilled to find he was so eager and ready. Never had he felt more self-possessed or more sure of what he had to do.

Turning over he opened his eyes in the puzzled manner of one awakening after heavy sleep. As he

did so he gained immediate reassurance, for their expressions told him that the ruse was succeeding.

"Why—hullo—!" he said blankly, but in a normal voice which satisfied even his critical ear. "Good-morning—I suppose it's morning? What are you doing here? What do you want? Lord, I feel as if I'd been asleep a month!"

He passed his hand across his brow with a natural gesture, touched the bandages, and at once looked bewildered.

"Sir" proved to be a slight stooped young man. His head poked inquiringly out from rounded shoulders, his black hair was brushed straight back, his whole face seemed drawn out to the sharp point of his nose. He looked worn and tired, and there were little red veins in his keen eyes. He wore uniform, and his hands were thrust into the jacket pockets, the thumbs aiming up at Emmet. He was a ferreter out of secrets, a prober, a living question mark. Emmet was quick to see that. Briggs was some kind of superior steward—a heavy, pasty-skinned man with white hair, pompous and yet servile. Briggs did not matter. But the doctor—Emmet dreaded him.

"Good!—old man," the doctor was exclaiming. "Yes, you've been taking a little shut-eye, but you're none the worse for that. Now you'll be out and about again in no time. Feeling better already, aren't we?"

Emmett, without knowing how or why, recognised the patronising geniality employed to hide sinister motives, but he compelled himself to reply with the humility expected of a patient: "Much better,

thanks, doctor!" Oh, the smooth, sane working of his brain! He rejoiced in it. And fortune had helped him. Had it not been for his earlier talk with the man on the settee he might have been in a corner now. As it was there need be no fumbling, no sign of weakness. "Of course!—I've got it! Just coming to like that, do you know, for the second I was a bit hazy. The earthquake, of course—! I gather I've been 'out to it' ever since. Well, I mustn't complain. I don't doubt thousands in Yokohama suffered worse than I did. What a ghastly business——!"

A shudder and a helpless gesture rounded off that nicely. The doctor was watching him with an air of surprised interest which Emmet found insulting, but at which he could afford to be inwardly amused.

The patient on the settee broke in indignantly.

"Don't you heed him, Dr. Hammond. That's only his pose to get sympathy. He's coming the hero touch! But what about me? I——"

The doctor, rashly, allowed his mask to fall. Emmet saw anger replace that smooth, encouraging interest.

"Oh, be quiet, Rankin," came the peremptory command. "You're doing yourself no good by carrying on like this. I tell you, man, you'll have to steady up." He turned back to Emmet, assuming his smugness again, but Emmet, out of the corner of his eyes, saw Briggs making an outraged and threatening gesture to quell the snivelling Rankin. The thought flashed through his mind that, if he succeeded, he was less likely to be sent to the mad-house than Rankin was, and, also, that in such a place there

would be many like Briggs who would be driven out of all patience by the irritating and irrational ways of their charges. He guessed what would follow then . . . His strength found renewal.

The doctor was smiling at him like a master, who, having rebuked a tiresome pupil, now dealt with one who did him credit. But Emmet had no faith in the continuance or honesty of any doctor's favour.

"This is splendid. You're looking better every minute. You were somewhat cut about the head, but the wounds are healing excellently. Come!—you feel almost yourself again, don't you?"

A trap?—Emmet was wary.

"As good as can be expected." This with a brave smile. "Are we getting near Kobe?"

"Yes, we'll be in in a few hours. So, naturally, I'm all the more pleased at your pulling around so well. We've been anxious about your identification. Now we'll be able to notify your relatives, if you wish."

Ah, there, indeed, was the trap! Emmet saw its jaws waiting for him, but outwardly he remained guileless. Well for him that he had not allowed his wits to be lulled into false security. But they would have to do better than this to confirm their suspicions. No trace of triumph marred his casual protest: "Surely you got all the necessary details from my papers?—passport, letter of credit and so on." He wondered how they would like being put in a corner like that.

"Unfortunately we haven't. You had no papers when you were brought aboard the *Empress of Australia*. There were several hundred pounds' worth

of high-denomination *yen* notes in your trousers' pocket, but nothing else. The purser has the notes for you."

Emmet nodded. Doctors would not rob you. Some people thought their bills were too high. It wasn't their bills that worried him, however, but their habit of taking charge of you as if you were a child and bullying you to do their will. This young man was up to the same game. But he had met his match.

"Oh, but my papers were in my coat," Emmet pointed out, giving him a chance to abandon deceit. "If I'd been robbed the money would have been taken. All my papers were in the wallet in my inside pocket—here!" He laid his hand on his right breast to show how certain of everything he was.

"That's just it. You were in your shirt sleeves. You hadn't a coat on. Your under-clothes aren't marked, but they were bought in Singapore. You hadn't even a handkerchief to give us a clue to your name——!"

"Good God—!" The panic-stricken exclamation was wrung from Emmet. His mind lost its poise. Either this was another piece of devilish ingenuity, or it was true. If true. . . . .

"Now you mustn't fret about a trifle like that!"

A trifle? He had to gain time to think. The face of the situation had been changed with appalling completeness. A sick man would be upset by news of such a loss. He closed his eyes wearily, and breathed a sigh of annoyance.

"Take it easily," the doctor was saying. "I've rather let you overtax your strength. Have a

breather and then you can tell me about yourself. Now don't worry. You'll be able to establish your identity quite easily at Kobe, and you'll find every one eager to help. I'll be busy with our friends below here for a while. You just lie quiet."

The advice was more easy to give than to take, but there was satisfaction to be drawn from the fact that the desired respite had been gained. Now to make the most of it.

Apparently whether his papers had been stolen or had really been lost he would have to assume they had gone. He had some foggy recollection about the coat, but that did not matter. The point was the position in which he found himself. That splendid mind of his seized with alacrity upon the new problem. He saw the course to be followed. To escape from the clutches of the doctors was the first essential, and that could only be done by keeping up the deception so brilliantly begun. Once away from them and this hateful country, in peace, his memory would grow again. Grow again!—that expressed it neatly. Seeds of the past would be buried beneath the ruins and would sprout, restoring him to his identity. But for this to happen the retention of his newly-won freedom was of first importance. After consideration he saw that, for the moment, it did not matter what name or personality he claimed. They would be none the wiser, assuming that his courage and cunning did not fail. He knew it would not. What was wrong with a brain which grappled with difficulties as his did? And yet they had said he might be mad. . . .

He opened his eyes cautiously and his glance rested

on a life-saving jacket wedged in a rack at the foot of the bunk. Stencilled upon it in small lettering almost effaced by dirt and dust was its name: The Kingsclere Jacket. Inspiration! The name of the life-preserver would do as well as any other to preserve his freedom. The conceit cheered him. It was daring, brazen. Nothing could daunt him. And how simple life was. Kingsclere was a man with a name—nothing more. The chains of existence did not bind him. He was the freest and sanest of creatures. He could even christen himself. He pondered in luxury on a name to go with Kingsclere, and, finally, with a sense of nice discrimination, selected Louis. Louis Kingsclere—that sounded well. There was a ring about it. Friends would call him Lou Kingsclere.

Conquering the impulse to announce the birth of Lou Kingsclere he waited with patience—which he had to admire—until the doctor straightened up.

"All right now?"—there was that deceiving interest again!

"Yes, but I'm tired, doctor. If you're ready we'll get this business out of the way. I'm Louis Kingsclere." He could have shouted with glee at how like his name it sounded.

The doctor nodded. He had taken out a pencil and was jotting the information down as if recording the creation of a temporary man was a most ordinary event. But his antagonist contrived to maintain an appearance of decorum.

"English, of course?"

"Yes."

"And where are you from, Mr. Kingsclere?"

In his amusement at hearing his name pronounced in such a matter-of-course way he nearly blundered, but checked his tongue in time to answer: "Oh, London." The lesson was valuable. It was not safe to relax for a moment. And what excitement this constant combat added to life!

"Would you like us to get a cable away to anybody for you?"

They were persisting, then, with their traps, but he rode triumphantly on the crest of his wave of deceit.

"No—no, thanks. I don't think it's worth while," he said, after discreet consideration. "I'll do it when I'm fit. I'm rather alone in the world"—How very much alone that cunning young doctor had no idea! —"and nobody'll be worrying about me. I doubt if three people at home know I'm in Japan. I set out on a roving trip for pleasure——"

"And got into the Yokohama earthquake!—that's about the height of bad luck, isn't it?" The doctor had either temporarily abandoned hope or knew of an easier victim. He was bustling and brisk now. "Well, I must leave you, Mr. Kingsclere. Congratulations on your recovery!" Sarcasm there? "We'll get you comfortable quarters at Kobe, and I can only hope that the rest of your trip's going to be better favoured. Get some sleep now. We'll be a long time yet. Come along, Briggs—we're all behind, you know."

He hurried out, followed by his assistant who seemed slightly aggrieved at the turn events had taken, probably because he was less adroit at concealing his real feelings.

Quiet, save for the noises of the ship, descended on the cabin. The man who had become Louis Kingsclere lay studying the bolts in the steel above him. A shadowy sense of alarm and guilt moved deep in his being, but this ghost was laid by the realisation that all he had done was no more than a temporary measure to gain time for recovery. Doctors were no use. They could not cure him. Hadn't the doctor himself admitted that time was the only cure? There was nothing to worry about. The tension could be relaxed now. He could sleep without fear of the morrow and untroubled by the past. Louis Kingsclere had not even been in the Yokohama earthquake. A smile bent his lips. With his alert mind life's riddles were really too easy!

Ah, there were points about being Lou Kingsclere! . . .

He turned on his side and snuggled down into the sheets with an appreciation of cosiness and ease as keen as a child's. It was good to be subsiding into misty sleep instead of falling into the dark depths of unconsciousness. Nothing to be afraid of now. . . . Nothing to fret about. . . .

The cabin rocked smoothly, like a cradle.

CHAPTER IV

The *Mithridates*, her mission of succour ended, had left Kobe at midnight and was thrusting down the Inland Sea bound for Hong Kong where she would resume her place on the London run. Her doctor stepped from his cabin and surveyed the scene with appreciative eyes. They travelled a narrow road of steely water between hills, pine-clad or cultivated, which rose one behind another to the blue of the ranges. On each bold headland was a lighthouse, white like a statue. Drab, rusty tramps—heavily burdened with deck cargo or so light that their thresh-ing screws showed—haughty, aloof liners, and fuss-ing tugs panting with sausage strings of barges swarmed and jostled like traffic in a city street. Quaint sailing-craft, which might have floated from a painted screen, bobbed clumsily on the waves flung out by her bow, sloe-eyed navigators on the lowly decks watching with blank and empty faces. Isles swam by, buried in flattened firs and showing flashes of red lacquer on bridges and temples. There were brown villages on the mainland and the tall chimneys of manufacturing towns sent up plumes of smoke.

Hammond stood, sharp face thrust forward, in an attitude which suggested he was anxious not to miss an atom of sensation. The voyage for him repre-sented the last fling of student days and romance. At its end he was doomed to settle to the humdrum existence of a general practitioner in a London suburb. But, as a result of the earthquake, it had proved a

worthy finale—a remarkable experience—an experience to be mentioned casually to patients for years to come in those little pauses which came, for instance, while the instruments were being sterilised.

He could hear himself: "So you've been abroad, eh? I envy you. When one's in practice there's little chance to get away. A week at Eastbourne is the best I can hope for these days. But when I was younger I was a great wanderer. One sees strange things! I remember I was in Yokohama at the time of that terrible earthquake. . . ."

The second officer, a pink-faced, blue-eyed young man, interrupted the silent monologue.

"Well, doc., think you'll buy the place?"

"Rather fine, isn't it?"

"So-so! You mightn't like it so much if you were on the bridge with these plurry tubs barging across your bows every minute. I say, I've been talking to your friend, Kingsclere, again. Seems a decent sort of bloke."

"Yes, he is." Hammond smiled. "I suppose I'll always have a kindly feeling for him, because I regard him as my first case."

"What about the quartermaster with the broken arm coming out?"

"Well, he didn't seem to count. And the other people we picked up at Yokohama just came and went. I suppose it's because Kingsclere elected to come on with us. It gave a chance to get to know him and feel he was appreciative. He doesn't say much, but I'm sure he's grateful."

"A queer bird! Solid and self-possessed, isn't he? Seems very sure of himself and all that. Sometimes

he gives you a feeling as if he knew a hell of a lot if only he cared to tell. No—that doesn't quite express it. What I mean to say is that he seems to have something up his sleeve which rather makes him look down on you because you're so simple. Know what I mean?"

He thrust his hands into his pockets and crinkled up his face inquiringly, rather pleased with this essay in psychology.

"Ye-es," Hammond assented doubtfully. "I find him an interesting personality, though I can never decide whether he's really deep or only seems to be because he won't let you plumb how shallow he is. He lives a good deal inside himself. To pull round so well he must be strong mentally. Take that other fellow for instance—what was his name again?—the one who was always clamouring for sympathy—oh, yes, Rankin! I doubt if he'll ever be quite right again. They've got him in hospital, and——" He shook his head ruefully over Rankin's prospects.

"Black business—!" agreed the second in tones of the utmost cheerfulness. "Well, I've a job of work—!" He drifted away humming a dance tune, too youthfully insensible to the calamities of life to be branded callous.

The doctor smiled. These seafarers amused him. They saw the globe round which they journeyed with the unconcerned eyes of people in a train flashing through the suburbs. They were for ever passing on, and never stayed to feel anything keenly save the affairs of their own narrow steel worlds which always hemmed them in.

He sauntered along the deck, and on the port side

found Kingsclere lying in a steamer chair. A gesture invited him to sit on the footrest, and he did so.

"It all looks peaceful enough, doesn't it," he remarked. "I begin to understand why the refugees refused to run further than Kobe, although I expected they'd be flocking away in thousands." He waved his hand at the land. "One of these days," he declared, "the whole of these islands will slip into the sea. Ships'll come looking for them and they won't be here—that's all."

"I wonder," said Kingsclere. Despite imperfectly healed scars he looked well. The lines still marked his face but it was fuller and firmer. His eyes were not so deeply set nor so weary, his voice had regained its timbre, his hands were steady. There was strength and repose in his manner. He was like one who had stepped out of the conflict of life and could view it impartially as a spectator. Dr. Xavier Murphy's prophecy had been fulfilled. Japan had made him a new man.

They were silent for a time watching the coastline and the ships. Kingsclere, idle in the sun, had ample occupation in his thoughts on which, in these days, he could always rely for amusement. There was still satisfaction and novelty in considering the miracle he had wrought so easily. Kobe, in turmoil, full of victims and shocked by reports throwing further light on the disaster, was in no state to be troubled about an individual who had money and had lost nothing save his luggage and papers. He could look after his own affairs; there were thousands in desperate plight. His statements were accepted, because there was neither need nor time to ques-

tion them. The simple case of Louis Kingsclere, tourist, of London, could be dispatched without delay. A pity they weren't all as easy. Red-tape was out of fashion. The new passport was supplied; he had money in his pocket with which to carry on. There was none to know or care that the bird of passage had made no attempt to establish his identity to more exacting bankers. The ship's people took it for granted that his affairs had been put in order, and it was natural for him to accept the offer of a passage away from a country so unsuited to his holiday. And there it was—accomplished! . . .

A smile—dreamy, secretive, illusive—dwelt in his eyes and played about his lips.

"Yes," reiterated the doctor, following his own train of musings, "swallowed up!"

"Probably enough," the listener agreed, but, again, he had been set off on an entirely different thread. He still smiled. People little knew what their chance remarks meant to him. Swallowed up! Real life with all its cares, responsibilities and trials—a burden of which he felt instinctively he had been bitterly weary—had been swallowed up leaving not a trace on the sea of his mind. He would play at life for a little now. And what an extraordinary chance he had; the building of a new man with all the wisdom of maturity. This Louis Kingsclere, unlike his fellows, had nothing to regret, nothing to change. He was able to start complete, instead of through all the stages of youth and foolishness.

Whatever his predecessor had been Louis Kingsclere was an irresponsible adventurer, who played

a colossal joke on all mankind, a conjuror who had performed the astonishing illusion of creating himself from the ruins of Yokohama. Nothing troubled him—nothing at all. But, immediately, he had to qualify that boast. He was troubled by what lay behind the curtain, by the mystery of the life and personality which had belonged to the shell he inhabited. Yes, he was afraid of that. But he hushed the fears by the reminder that he had no intention of remaining Louis Kingsclere. He insisted on the point. Louis Kingsclere would cease—snap!—as he had been born. He was merely the creature of an interlude, of a necessary expedient, of a frolic with a very real purpose. Of course, as soon as he could remember. . . .

His gaze returned out of the distance to Hammond. There sat the doctor and he saw him now merely as an amusing bundle of ignorance whose only importance was as a token of conquest. It occurred to him that it would be fun to demonstrate to himself the completeness of his escape by baiting that which he had dreaded.

"I suppose you're quite proud of my recovery, doctor?" he began in a friendly, easy way.

"Frankly, I am," Hammond admitted, turning his pointed face and regarding the speaker with possessive admiration.

"You've every right to be. You know for a time, just when I was semi-conscious, I'd an idea I wasn't going to be quite right up here—!" He tapped his brow, exulting inwardly. "I fancy once, through a haze, I heard you say something of the kind—a doubt you had about when I came round——?"

The doctor apologised with a grimace.

"Sorry, you weren't supposed to have heard that. One never knows, of course, though I recognised the odds were that all would be well. I'd seen lots of somewhat similar cases in the hospitals. One does, of course——!" He made a vague gesture more expressive than words of the number of such cases one saw.

"Of course——! It's funny—just as you came along I was thinking what a pickle I'd have been in if—well, if I'd lost my memory." He put the supposition as a nice abstract point, his voice casual, his eyes steady, his face without a tremor. There was intoxication in the knowledge of how safe it was. He might as well have suggested how awkward it would have been if his skin had turned green. His feat of magic was so perfect that it was above suspicion.

"Yes, awkward!" Hammond acknowedged, stroking his jaw. "I don't quite know what we'd have done."

"The more one thinks of it the more interesting the speculation grows, and the more peculiar issues open out. Life's such an odd business. Now I might have been all kinds of things better forgotten—might have been running away after murdering my mother, father, wife and children—might, from a sense of duty, have been on my way to do something which spelt absolute ruin. You follow me? Fancy what a position! In either case I'd have been able to start with a clean sheet, untroubled even by conscience, as free from the knowledge of sin as a babe unborn, or Adam before the Fall. But, of course, on the other hand, I might have been the happiest

man alive and have been robbed of all kinds of joy. Quite a nice little proposition, isn't it?"

"It is that—very! But, of course, such a loss of memory, of individuality, could not be expected to last long——"

"Oh, yes, I grant that," Kingsclere hastened to agree, passing his hand briefly across his eyes as if the sun hurt them. "But memory's a queer mixture of curse and blessing, isn't it? Suffering and sorrow and sin bulk so much larger than pleasure and joy and good deeds in the average life that memory must be more a nuisance than anything. I wonder if one really forgot would one be wise to remember?"

"I should say that would depend on the past you'd had."

"Obviously! But you see the difficulty? How would one know? Fancy being as carefree as a man without yesterday, with only to-day and to-morrow, and then being faced with the choice. Supposing he elected to remember, only to discover too late that he had fished back out of nothingness trouble and shame, things he should have left undone, things he should have done. How would he feel then? Yesterday, as I've said, might only make a man a murderer. Oh, believe me, it's not the clear cut matter you'd make out."

"He'd be a coward, anyway, if he wouldn't face it."

"I admit that again," the other acquiesced readily, but, after a pause, added: "On the other hand though we talk glibly about courage and cowardice which is which? Mightn't it, in a sense, take as much courage to gamble one way as the other. He could not know whether he stood to win or lose. He would have to

take the chance. That needs nerve. Look at what he would stand to lose if he had flung bliss away. Mightn't modesty—a sense of his own unfitness and shortcomings—and other quite admirable attributes drive him to be what we're calling 'a coward'?"

"Yes, there's that, of course. Um!—oh, I don't know!"

The ship's bell struck eight times, was echoed from the engine-room, and again, more thinly, from a passing vessel. The siren coughed once, shortly.

"Noon," said Hammond standing up and jerking his shoulders. "Come on and have a drink. Your darned conundrums are a bit too tough for me on a sunny day in the Inland Sea."

"Right! I've had one, but I don't suppose another'll do any harm."

They strolled to the smokeroom. Kingsclere had withdrawn into himself again, and was engaged with the secret he had hidden there. He gloated over it. It added zest to everything; gave value to the simplest acts and exchanges; filled his days with exotic, fantastic interest. Courage or cowardice?—interchangeable terms according to the viewpoint. And, in any case, as they had agreed, yesterday would return. In the meantime there was only to-day, unvexed and unvexing. It was no use trying to force things, and the wisest course in every way was to accept them as they were. His mind would soon heal in this blessed peace. It was strange that the only shadow flung upon his soul should be that of the mere ghost of yesterday—significant, too, in a sense! But to-day the sun shone. When the time came he would seek the past bravely enough. He might dally

awhile with this sweet poppy of forgetfulness, but, at any moment, he could, and would, break himself from the drug, lay aside the opium pipe which made him Louis Kingsclere, and become himself again.

"What'll you drink?" the doctor was asking.

"I'll have a cocktail, thanks." He worked his chair around. "Oh, barman!—what do you recommend for the invalid this time?"

The barman assumed his judicial air, looked up at the skylight for inspiration, bowed.

"Well, sir, we've a 'special'—we call it the 'Mithridates'—after the ship, sir. It's a rum cocktail, sir—Bacardi."

"That sounds tempting!" said Lou Kingsclere with a nod.

BOOK TWO
CAPTURE

CHAPTER V

Mr. Frederic Enderby—F. Enderby & Co., merchants, Hong Kong and Fenchurch Street, London, E.C.3—threw his broad body back in his chair, linked his hands over his stomach, pressed his thumbs together and looked rosy and benign. Within him was housed a perfect digestive system, which, even after forty years in the East, performed its functions with such regularity that Mr. Enderby's golf handicap was six and he was extremely rich and quite happy. The chair, as usual, groaned a protest against the strain, but chairs in that office could be trusted. A failure—apart from the mere physical consequences—would have been catastrophic, for Mr. Enderby's soul would have been more shaken than his body. The chair, therefore, continued to perform its duty, and Mr. Enderby continued to beam at life and Louis Kingsclere with incorrigible affability and content.

"Well, well!—congratulations, Mr. Kingsclere, congratulations!" he boomed mellowly. Early in life Mr. Enderby had cultivated redundancy in speech to conceal the slowness of his mind. The habit endured, though Mr. Enderby and his digestive organs had mounted to heights where self-criticism would have been as undignified as it was unnecessary. Indeed, concealment had always been superfluous, for this slowness had been largely responsible for building up his business reputation as a man of

sound and considered judgments. "An excellent stroke of luck—excellent!" He glowed.

Kingsclere expressed his thanks. Mr. Enderby's congratulations had the quality of a benediction and made his good fortune a credible fact.

"It is extraordinary—most extraordinary—that you should be the second man in this office to have a good win in a Shanghai Club sweep. Yes, the second. You have heard, no doubt?" Kingsclere was politely silent; everybody in Hong Kong had heard frequently. "Some years ago—it must be ten years ago, surely—poor Hopkins won five thousand. But your share is worth ten thousand, eh? A nod was demanded and given. "Ten thousand pounds! Well, quite a nice little sum of money—enough to give you a good start. I hope you'll put it to better use than poor Hopkins did. Easy come, you know, easy come——! Poor Hopkins began to drink too much, and he had not the constitution for that. His liver was bad. Suicided at Monte Carlo I heard afterwards. Gambling, no doubt. But there are gambles and gambles——!" He unlocked his hands, and made a complacent gesture admitting that, in a sense, even the business with which he had enriched the Empire and himself might be regarded as a gamble of the better kind. "Hopkins, yes—five thousand was just enough to ruin him. I suppose this will mean —the effect of this will be—that we shall be losing your services, Mr. Hopkins—er—Mr. Kingsclere?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Enderby—naturally——!"

A shadow passed across the merchant's face at the statement that such a course was natural, but he immediately beamed again in his comfortable way. "I

regret that, Mr. Kingsclere—I regret it. When you first came to me—how long ago——?"

"Going on for three years ago, sir."

"Yes, it must be going on for three years. When you first came to me going on for three years ago seeking employment, penniless—though I refer to that without disparagement—and unknown, I took a risk, Mr. Kingsclere, on my own judgment of men. It was a risk, you know, when you had lost all your papers in that earthquake—the earthquake of Yokohama if I remember rightly. You came to me, as it were, without a past, Mr. Kingsclere." He allowed himself to smile at the happy phrase. His hearer smiled, also—a smile slow and steady which lit his eyes and then appeared about the corners of his mouth setting fleeting lines on his smooth brown skin. "Many men would not have been prepared to back their own opinion in such a case—for it could be no more than one's opinion. I, however, backed my opinion and am glad to be able to say you have justified that opinion—justified it completely. You have a natural aptitude for business—a very real aptitude, Mr. Kingsclere. Accordingly in one sense I regret this win of yours. Frankly you might have gone—might have gone far with us——!"

He succeeded in balancing his body an inch or so nearer the horizontal to express the completeness of his satisfaction, while Kingsclere murmured appreciation.

"I speak now as your friend, Mr. Kingsclere—as your friend and a much older man. It is not my part to preach at you—no, not to preach—but I have in my mind the experience of poor Hopkins, Edward

Hopkins. You follow me, Mr. Kingsclere? I am hoping that you will make better use of this money than poor Hopkins did."

"I certainly hope so, too," Kingsclere agreed, and again he smiled at the man with the perfect digestion.

"You say you are leaving us—I gather you have quite made up your mind to leave us—would it be impertinent if I asked you—asked you as a friendly question—what you purpose doing?"

"Not at all!—I'm going to travel. I'm going down to the Islands." He rubbed his jaw slowly, and repeated as if he had contracted Mr. Enderby's trick of speech. "Yes, I'm going down to the Islands. I feel as if I'd always wanted to go there. To the Pacific—not this Pacific, but the other lazy one—South!" His head with a sideways motion indicated the direction in which his dreams would take him, and his eyes did not see Mr. Enderby. "I feel certain I've always wanted to go there," he repeated, not for Mr. Enderby's information but his own, for he was wondering again in what far city and caught in what routine he had yearned for the Pacific, sea of escape and peace. He found no answer to the question; he only knew.

The sun of Mr. Enderby's face was clouded by concern. This enterprise did not appeal at all to a man of even mental and physical habits. It was exotic and smacked of irregularity. But before he could speak a Chinese clerk—wearing horn-rimmed spectacles and so immaculate that he looked unnatural, like a wax model of what a modern young Chinese should be—entered with a block of cheques

requiring signatures. Mr. Enderby took up his pen with an air which indicated a lesson to be learned from such steady attention to duty's round even in the face of hair-brained announcements.

There was silence in the room save for the steady scratch of the pen and the whir of the fan above. Outside the clatter of the East went on—a constant noise of shrill voices and many pattering feet, like that arising from a gigantic nursery. When for the last time the firm signature had been written, the clerk—checking, as he always had to, the old-fashioned and slavish Oriental bow—took the block and withdrew. Mr. Enderby allowed himself to sink back to his former angle, but he surveyed Kingsclere now with a puzzled interest which suggested that he saw him for the first time as an individual rather than a part of the efficient machine. The man before him was strongly built and healthy. His face —on which the white lines of old scars showed— suggested resolution and control in its firm jaw, the hooked line of the nose and the set of the big mouth, but this effect was marred and mitigated, in Mr. Enderby's opinion, by the eyes which were grey and thoughtful and shone with some mysterious and unpractical amusement. Out of a corner of memory came a recollection of his only other close inspection of Kingsclere—when he had engaged him. Those eyes, then, had seemed slightly dangerous to Enderby & Co. He knew now, however, that they were only dangerous to their owner. For a second he continued his silent scrutiny in which there was a subtle suggestion of pity and inability to comprehend a weakness. If Kingsclere had confessed that he suffered from

constipation Mr. Enderby would have looked at him in the same fashion.

"The Pacific—really? The Islands?" These might have been seas and lands unknown. The heavy white eyebrows lifted, meeting across his nose. "What a peculiar idea!—how peculiar for a young man with such an aptitude for business!"

Kingsclere, hearing himself so described, was tempted. He was independent now. It would be amusing to reveal how amazingly young Lou Kingsclere was—a mere baby. But he conquered the impulse. Shared, his secret would have lost its savour, even apart from the danger that the whole fantastic fabric of his days might be destroyed. That was a prospect not even to be contemplated, and least of all now with the freedom given by wealth added to the hidden freedom he enjoyed. Still smiling he held his counsel, as he had done so often.

Mr. Enderby misread the smile.

"Come," he exclaimed, " you can't be much over thirty?"

"No, I'm not."

"Well, then, that is young—quite young. And ten thousand pounds—what is that?" His inflection dwarfed the sum into paltriness. "Ten thousand is enough to provide the foundations, but it is not enough to try and live on. That would be dangerous —very dangerous." He pursed his lips up and wagged his head at the prospect. "I'm sorry, very sorry, to hear what you intend, Mr. Kingsclere. And what do you expect to find in these Islands?—this Pacific?"

"That remains to be seen. I've a fancy to try

planting. But if that doesn't work out, I'll drift along——"

"Drift——!" echoed Mr. Enderby, trying from good-nature to conceal the shudder the word sent through him. "Drift!—that's the peril. That's the peril! Can't I—isn't it possible for me—at least an older man if nothing else—to dissuade you?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Enderby." Kingsclere felt indulgent towards this kindly soul who was the slave of the past and had built up a meaningless independence on the grave of forgotten liberty. He could admit that there was much to be said for Mr. Enderby's point of view, but the conviction remained that it was not for him. "It's hard for you to understand, I'm afraid, Mr. Enderby," he pointed out. "I look at things so differently from you. I have to, for I am a wanderer, a nomad, by disposition. A business career's not my line; I'm a romantic." He spoke with certainty, because whatever had been the habits and character of his former individuality the Lou Kingsclere he had made was certainly as he described him. "I'd been a slave before the Yokohama earthquake, but I came out of it, in a peculiar way, freed. I looked at life differently."

"Ah, yes, quite!—the shock!" sighed Mr. Enderby, sympathetically.

But Kingsclere's eyes twinkled.

"You're sorry for me—you shouldn't be. Before I was a life's servant, but—having as it were triumphed over death—I became life's master. I used it; it could not use me any more. It sounds foolish, but it's hard to express. You see what I mean . . .?" Mr. Enderby was not sure that he did, but he looked

intelligent. "For a time, of course, the sheer practical fact that I'd no money compelled me to settle down to the dullness of routine, but I knew all along that it was only for a time. I've worked loyally, and now the tide's turned. I'm free—the freest man alive, with no responsibilities, no ambitions, no ties—as free as the wind. Given my nature surely you'll see how natural it is that I should enjoy my freedom?"

Mr. Enderby righted himself and leaned across the table, resting on his elbows. A groping, wistful expression displaced the habitual healthy content. Mr. Enderby had reached the age to recognise that life, at best, was an unsatisfactory business if you thought about it, and that whatever a man had his heart desired something else, but although he knew success had brought him many things no philosophy could banish the craving for those other experiences, which, automatically, had been placed beyond his reach. The eyes which looked into Kingsclere's were hungry and questioning—in that moment, confronted by a gypsy of life, even prosperity, regular bowels and a golf handicap of six were not enough.

When he spoke it was in a tone Kingsclere had never heard him use before—a vague, undecided tone which betrayed he was striving to grapple with intangibilities.

"Oh, quite! quite! It depends on one's nature, doesn't it? Depends on one's nature!" But he could not string the words out enough to gain the time to decide what he really wanted to say, so that, instead, he remembered briskly that at five he was to play 18-holes with Harrison and would probably beat him,

and thereupon resumed the garb of ordinary life with an ease and completeness which proclaimed the enviable cleanliness of his internal arrangements. "It's your own affair," he declared, leaning back again and radiating good temper. "Quite your own affair. No man can teach another what he should do. If you feel you're right you probably are. And since that's disposed of let's get down to business. Yes, to business. How much longer are you prepared to remain, to stay, with us, Mr. Kingsclere?"

They turned to the practical with a mutual sense of relief.

Half-an-hour later Louis Kingsclere stood on the steps of the office which faced the Praya. He felt elated, satisfied, amused. Ricksha boys and chair-carriers regarded him with hopeful, dog-like eyes, but he remained motionless. A stream of passengers crossed before him to the tin-roofed shed where the Kowloon ferry lay. There was constant activity among the lines of launches which were backed against the shore as if about to start on a race. A three-funnelled, khaki and black B. I. liner was sliding across the middle distance; the swarming junks sailed easily, their tattered shreds of matting catching an unfelt breeze; the hulk of an aircraft carrier rose in a wall and a submarine sneaked in like a water-snake; crazy Chinese tramps—*Hing Sangs, Sez Yats* and the like—waddled about; the fat water-boats plied their trade; ships of every nationality and tonnage were strung in rows to the mooring buoys. Above an aeroplane drifted against the green-blue sky. All about the peaks rose, one dimensional,

purple and sharp with bald sandy patches on their flanks. The water was the colour of jade. And everywhere—movement.

Kingsclere meditated on this panorama of man's activity and restlessness with appreciation. It suited his mood. He, too, had ceased to be a fixture. He could go out to sea; his anchor was up; adventure awaited him.

A squad of soldiers swung by in khaki shorts, their rifles slung over their shoulders. Kingsclere found entertainment in their very British faces which were blank and red and broad, the faces of countrymen. They were quite insensible to the romantic setting in which Whitehall had decreed they should sojourn a while. But as he watched them Kingsclere realised that he was as numb to the beauties of Hong Kong as they were. He wondered why, and decided that it was simply because the time had come to pass on. He had to seek something else. And there were too many people here. He was not as his fellows; he wanted to escape from them and eat in solitude the secret bread of forgetfulness which had become more and more his food. How the habit had grown on him, gripped him!—until this dramatic change in his fortunes it had become so much a part of his nature that he had ceased to be aware of it. When had he last tried or wished to remember? He could not tell. And there was the disturbing knowledge that now he had the means to go home and make the effort to find his lost past. He moved uneasily, and hope sprang up in the waiting ricksha boys, but the action was no more than the impatient stirring of an opium-eater troubled by conscience.

"The fact remains that I couldn't remember even if I wanted to," he reasoned with himself.

A voice raised in greeting aroused him.

"Hullo, Kingsclere, how's the 'head'?"

Saunders, who was with the Canadian-Pacific people, stood before him, grinning.

"Not so bad," he answered.

"You looked as if you were still suffering from last night the way you were day-dreaming there," said Saunders who was accompanied by a stranger. "This is Godby—used to be here years ago. This is Kingsclere, Godby—the lucky devil heard yesterday he'd raked off ten thou. from the sweep."

Godby shook hands and offered congratulations. "I'm from Shanghai myself," he said, adding half-seriously: "I don't know why we get up a sweep to enrich you blighters all over the place. It never seems to come our way."

They strolled towards the club, and the talk drifted from Kingsclere's luck and plans to others who had won that year and in the past, and from that—as they stood in the bar and gave their orders—to this one whom Godby had known and who was at Swatow now, and that one gone up to Pekin, and another just married while home on leave —the endless tale of movement and the flow of personal gossip which makes up conversation in the white man's East, a world apart within a world apart.

Kingsclere was outside this talk. He was only three years old. It made him feel lonely and isolated. He was glad to be going away. Saunders, glancing at him, saw that Kingsclere was sinking into one of

those queer, moody fits of his. He ordered another round of drinks hastily, because he liked Lou Kingsclere and could not understand what went wrong with such a steady, pleasant fellow now and then to make him seem so strange.

CHAPTER VI

Saigon, the port of Indo-China, stands as an expression of the Frenchman's love for France. It is a corner of his homeland, picked up complete, carried across the world and set down beneath more ardent skies. It is Marseilles in miniature with its friendly ladies, its tree-lined boulevards, its magasins and its vivid posters advertising apéritifs and cures for uric acid. Here the little cafés with their striped awnings and the broad, table-crowded terraces; here the hopeless and resigned vendors of rugs, the sly traders in interesting postcards and the sellers of flimsy and ill-printed newspapers—all utterly unlike the hawkers to be found elsewhere in the East; here the bearded men whose only occupation seems to be talking forever over green and red syrups; here the noise and bustle, the sense of crowds idle but never still. Port Said is Gallicised; Saigon is France.

Kingsclere, sitting before the Continental Palace on the Rue Catinat, was keenly conscious of a changed atmosphere. It gave him a holiday mood. Hong Kong might have been on another continent; Enderby's office was of the long ago. He had escaped again. But he could look back now. He had a past —a comfortable past, untroubled, burdened with no regrets. Yesterday was merely something through which he had lived and from which he had passed on. He settled back in his cane chair and breathed a sigh of relief and satisfaction.

It was evening, and the town awakened after the enervating heat of the day. A breeze whispered in

the trees above, and set the leaves of those on the further side of the road throwing restless shadows on the lemon fronts of the buildings. Almost every place was occupied, and the chatter was incessant. Within, a band played the characteristic music of Parisian revues, and feet beat time on the grey, deeply-bisected tiles. The metal globes on their tripods shone in the brightness of the lights.

Noticing these details as strange and yet familiar Kingsclere wondered whether he had ever been in France. Another of those fascinating lines of conjecture was opened up for him. He toyed happily with it while continuing to watch the scene.

Pure blooded natives were few, but the shaded people, the Eurasians, abounded. They drifted by in shoals, on foot, in rickshas and in their Renaults and Citroens. The women were moist mountains of fat, but the young girls were slim, and thin-ankled and graceful as gazelles. They had moist dark eyes, sad and yet wicked, like the eyes of fallen angels. The cool glances which they crossed with the loungers set red tongues flickering over soft lips. It occurred to Kingsclere that in British colonies in the East the men had the looks, but in the French the position was reversed. There was, for example, that absurd gross man beneath a high, domed helmet which made him look comically like a figure from an old print. He was goggling amorously down into the eyes of a fallen angel beautiful as a houri and dressed like a Parisian. She was laughing up at him, anxious to please, and she caressed his soft hand. Kingsclere marvelled, and idly conjured up preposterous pictures of their love-making. . . .

The couple drifted away. He called a waiter—complete with green baize apron—who brought another glass on a price-marked saucer. Kingsclere was not sure what the contents were, but the waiter seemed so certain the drink was what he needed that he accepted it rather than attempt again to make an order understood. It did not matter. He was merely filling in time until young Kennedy arrived.

Young Kennedy arrived with a rush, tripping over a stick and knocking a hat from a neighbouring table. He apologised briefly, but was too full of regrets for being late to be aware of the scornful glances evoked by his clumsiness. This blundering, healthy young creature had the charm and faults of a growing puppy. In that company, with his fair hair and blue eyes, he looked very English and as if he had just emerged from a bath, still rather rumpled after it but much refreshed. Kingsclere liked him. He had known of young Kennedy through an association with Enderby's, and had sought him out on arrival to be received with delight, for a visitor was welcome in Saigon where the English and American colony did not number fifty.

"I say," said young Kennedy, dropping into a chair, "sorry to be so late, but you'll forgive me when you know why." He ordered cocktails in French of which he was rather proud.

"That's all right. I've had plenty to interest me."

"I'd have been on time, only I thought you might like to meet a girl I know." He blushed. "Or, anyway's there's a girl I wanted you to meet. I'm crazy about her. You'll like her, too—you won't be able to help it."

"I shan't try."

"She's an absolute knock-out. I'm keen to see what you think of her. I sent her a chit during the day and she said she thought she'd be able to come along, but I looked in just now to make sure. She's staying at the annexe. She sent down word I wasn't to wait, and that she'd be over in a minute. You just wait! Oh, she's marvellous——!"

Such enthusiasm amused Kingsclere, and, at the same time, made him envious. What a thing it was to be so young! Not to be three years old, but to have real youth. This exuberant youngster awoke those painful pricklings of doubt which were intermittently troublesome. Kingsclere was reminded that he had bartered the memories of true youth for a wonderful imitation. But had he gained by the deal? His eyes clouded.

"Tell me about her," he invited, because that was expected.

"Well, you see, it's a darned shame—tragic!" The story bubbled out. "She came here with a dud show —a light opera crowd. They brought a whole lot of girls—engaged them in France on a franc basis at quite good pay—but when they got here they found that the piastre is based on the pound and that their money wasn't worth even enough to live on. Well, most of them got over that easily enough—there were queues of these Frenchmen waiting to keep 'em, for there are mighty few white wives out here, I can tell you. But Leila was not that kind—not by a hell of a long way! She wasn't having any—she's straight! You see what she's up against? I've done the best I can for her, but, of course, that's not as

much as I wanted to. She's scraping along some way, but it's hard on the poor kid. God, I'm sorry for her!" He flushed again but with sympathy and emotion now.

Kingsclere did not laugh. He was sorry for young Kennedy.

"I'm afraid I won't make much of a hit with the lady," he pointed out. "My French just isn't."

"Oh, don't worry about that. She speaks English as well as we do—better, in fact, because every now and then she puts in a little twisted phrase in absolutely the cutest way. She's lived in England, and her father was an English army officer who retired early and went to live in the South of France where he married a French girl. Leila's inherited all the good qualities of both races. You wait and see for yourself, though—don't believe me!"

"All right, I'll wait then," Kingsclere agreed, but he had his own picture of this Leila—tow-haired, enamelled, rapacious, walking with the pigeon-toed elegance of a harlot. Circumstances, however, had made him practised in deception and his voice rang sincerely as he continued without a pause: "Here's to her in the meantime!"

Young Kennedy, pleased, drained his glass, and became confidential.

"That was sporting of you. Look here, I'll tell you something. I've a rise coming to me in two months and then my firm'll allow me to marry. I'm going to marry Leila—if she'll have me, that is."

"Are you, indeed——?" asked Kingsclere politely.

"Rather! I——" He broke off. "Ssh!" he warned, "here she comes."

He hurried off to meet his lady. Kingsclere's slightly satirical glance followed him. But the girl Leila was not the girl of Kingsclere's picture. He had been so certain that he was startled now, and the reality excited him more than if he had believed young Kennedy. His assurance was shaken; his interest aroused.

In place of the expected giggling coquette he saw a girl who attracted glances as a magnet attracts steel-filings, but who remained as coldly calm as a magnet, as unconscious of power, as effortless. Although she was not tall and her body was firmly—almost solidly—moulded she achieved natural dignity by her poise. She moved easily from the hips, certain of her feet. Among the fallen angels she looked serene and calm as a lily, though her grace was not that of the lily, rather that of a lithe yet sturdy young tree. Her frock was pink, brief, light and soft. It conjured up another simile in Kingsclere's quickened mind. She was bright like a flame, but a magical flame, steady and cool.

He rose. Young Kennedy was steering her among the tables, one hand lightly touching her smooth, round arm. Experienced eyes all about stripped, judged and desired her. She remained aloof, not with the haughtiness of a professional beauty but merely by reason of her utter unconsciousness. She wore reserve like a suit of armour, and Kingsclere knew that she could have passed through fiercer attacks than these assaulting eyes and emerged unscathed.

Her features were distinguishable now. Her face was cut squarely with high, almost Oriental cheek-

bones and a firm mouth. Through the whiteness of her skin colour glowed as it were from beneath, giving it an olive tone. Her eyes were big and dark, and she wore her smooth, dark hair cut short to a straight line and brushed closely to her well-shaped head. She listened to young Kennedy's chatter, gravely attentive, and with the same composure floated easily through the business of the introduction, though young Kennedy was nervous and Kingsclere was embarrassed by the intense interest with which he knew he was regarding her. She gave him a deliberate scrutiny, and out of her thoughts grew a slow smile. Kingsclere found this smile peculiarly disturbing. It came warmly and softly and went leaving her face in repose. He received an impression of dispassionate judgment.

Young Kennedy was eager to learn what they thought of each other, but wiser eyes than his would have been needed to read their faces which gave nothing to the curious world. Something about them, he could not have said what and had never noticed it when alone with Leila, gave him a sensation of rawness and inexperience. But young Kennedy was not addicted to introspection or kindred follies. He put the fancy aside, and ordered drinks with the air proper to a man with the prettiest woman in the place.

"You are English?" Leila was saying.

Kingsclere thought of the voice of a bird which if it wished could sing loud and sweet but preferred to hush its music to a private and gentle note.

"Yes. You've been there?"

"I love England and I love France. This awful

country I hate. But your name—Louis—that is French surely?"

She raised level brows very slightly.

"I suppose it might be, but I got it simply because it appealed to my father." He smiled secretly at that. "I don't think there's much French in my family—not in me at any rate to judge by the results when I tried to order a drink here."

Her smile came and went.

"You are travelling in the *Charlemagne* which is held up for a time with something wrong with her inside—her engines?"

"Yes, I'm on my way down to Singapore. Then I'll go on from there to the Islands—just wandering about, you know."

"Ah," she said, hushing her voice still more, "what a lovely thing to be able to say! How I envy you! My Ken, you see, has been telling me about you. You have been lucky indeed?"

Kingsclere agreed. Cocktails arrived. The talk ran on smoothly, young Kennedy joining in it at intervals but in the main resting content in the knowledge that they seemed to be getting on well. He wanted them to; it confirmed a fellow's taste. Gradually, almost subconsciously, he discovered a peculiar quality about their personalities observed thus together. There was some vague similarity between them; a note which puzzled him was common to both. The idea came to him that they were like two wise people who, while attracted, were a little cautious, neither being quite sure how much the other knew. But it went deeper than that. He was too puzzled to recognise that he had ceased to be a mem-

ber of his own party and had become a spectator.

"I say, you two are alike you know," he remarked, cocking his head on one side and considering them. "It's funny, because you're not a scrap alike really. It's something in your expression or your eyes or your manner or something—funny!" He gave it up, helplessly.

"I bow," said Kingsclere, but was more impressed than he betrayed.

"The resemblance isn't in our noses anyway, Ken," Leila remarked lightly. Her nose was short and straight, like a chip of marble. The smile which accompanied the words was directed at Kingsclere. It said in a veiled aside but clearly as if she had spoken: He's right, isn't he? It's odd, but it must be very evident if even he can see it. Aren't you interested, as I am, in what it can be?

"No, I'm darned if I know where the likeness is, but it's there," said young Kennedy, unheeded. He seemed more youthful than ever. "Anyway, I like you both and you seem to be going to get on, so all's well. Let's talk about something we can eat. Are you ready?"

They were.

The meal was an unqualified success. It drifted easily by with good food and wine and a steady flow of talk. Beneath this surface there ran intangible but strong currents of content and satisfaction springing from deep, unknown wells. Young Kennedy felt dimly awed by the party he had arranged, for he was beset by a sense of events in progress and forces at work which were just beyond his perception. As an antidote he refilled his glass frequently.

They ate in the open dining-room looking out over the terrace to the Rue Catinat which emptied for a time and filled again. The fans above sent down streams of cooling air. Young Kennedy had never seen Leila look more beautiful. The pink frock suited her, and the shaded light flushed her skin slightly, making her appear as if inwardly excited while outwardly as calm as ever—a contradiction which seemed to him to express her charm. Young Kennedy thought she was divine. He was proud of the way she had captured the attention of this chap Lou Kingsclere who was an older man and experienced and shrewd as they made them.

Kingsclere was his normal self again, but his mind was busy. He realised that the happiness of his life had been negative. He had not been unhappy, had gone along in a comfortable rut. This hour was different. It was full of positive and stimulating emotion. It stirred his blood, and enabled him to comprehend fully that now he was restored to the rôle of an adventurer in which he had found himself when the smoky fogs of Yokohama had drifted away. Every sensation seemed keener and more distinct. His mood was such that he could almost believe he tasted the bubbles in the wine. Strange that he had omitted the element of sex from Louis Kingsclere's life. He had met and talked and danced with some plain fiancées, plainer wives and even plainer nurses in Hong Kong, but that had meant nothing.

This was different. It was. . . . The definition evaded him. He was glad it did. He looked into Leila's deep eyes and listened to the music of her voice with absorbed attention which was rewarded

with little information and yet was satisfied. And, all the time, without neglecting her host, Leila contrived to present the riddle of her personality to him with a detached self-possession, considering him the while with an interest equal to his but more completely hidden.

"Well, wasn't I right? Don't you think she's a marvel?" young Kennedy demanded at the first opportunity which was when they went to wash after the meal.

"Yes," said Louis Kingsclere. "Yes. She is very lovely, and such a mystery, isn't she?"

He turned the tap and began to hum a little song as so many do with the sound of running water to encourage them.

CHAPTER VII

At Leila's thoughtful suggestion poor little Ninon Casalis had been brought along to serve as a partner for Kingsclere and to make up the four. Ninon was another of the unfortunate members of the light opera company, but she appeared to be enduring her vicissitudes with admirable spirit. She was a plump, round-eyed little animal, with a wet pouted mouth, amorous legs and the innocent diablerie of a child. Dancing proved to be her delight, and, accordingly, she and young Kennedy were dancing a lot together, Leila unexpectedly finding neither the night nor her mood suited to physical exertion.

But Leila was very nice about it. Her laziness was not to be allowed to spoil that poor child's fun. She urged her Ken to dance with Ninon, and he did so, full of admiration for such sweetness of character. He was able to congratulate himself. Their second evening was working out as well as the dinner-party. Leila declared she was idle—well, she and Kingsclere seemed content enough in their quiet way at the little table beneath the trees. Ninon made no secret of the fact that she was adoring every minute. She had told him, with ingenuous boldness, that she liked to be held so that she knew she had a partner, and he had found that she certainly danced more wonderfully when his arm tightened about her. And she was such a soft little thing; she nestled so. His French, she declared, was perfect.

In these circumstances young Kennedy congratu-

lated himself on having gathered together an admirable quartette.

They were at Pierre's, some twenty kilometres outside Saigon. The place was no more than an old white house with an open-sided room for dancing, an execrable orchestra and a dusty garden dotted with tables. Pierre dignified his establishment by the style of "Cabaret," and with justification, though the only artist was not upon his salary list. Night provided the cabaret at Pierre's—Night, the magician and conjuror, Night with her singing breezes, her dancing stars, her enveloping passionate presence and the dark wonder of her hair. When Night came to Pierre's his patrons had their money's worth.

Leila and Kingsclere sat at the further side of the garden on the edge of a tangle of greenery which tumbled down a sharp slope. At the foot of this slope was a river, and coloured lights in the trees threw a faint radiance so that the yellow waters were revealed stealing by. They whispered secrets as they went. The air was warm and soft, but gracious breaths of coolness wandered into the garden out of the immense darkness. The stars came down to rest upon the branches and dim Pierre's little lamps.

There were chattering groups at the other tables, and in the box of the dance-room young Kennedy and the rest walked and paused and turned. A stout lady tourist—weirdly gay in a hat with a great cerise bow rigid at the back like a propeller—had taken too much of Pierre's wine. She was flushed, moist and goggle-eyed, and, having broken away from her elderly partner, was doing clumsy steps in the middle of the floor and appealing to the band with painful

abandon: "Play 'Mam'shelle from Armentiers'. *Can't* you play 'Mam'shelle from Armentiers'?" The heroic violinist continued to gaze at her with adoring eyes, while her partner's hands fumbled vaguely seeking to effect a re-capture. Seen from the quiet by the river-side the scene was like a crude lithograph. The heat, noise and silliness did not come beyond the edge of the white frame. Even the disturbance created by the band was refined down to a musical rhythm in which the feet slurring on the stone floor made a soothing monotone. Pierre's artist, Night, saw to these things.

"People do look silly, don't they?" Leila remarked, tranquilly. Her tone gave Kingsclere a sensation of being shut-off with her, alone and aloof, in the peace of the darkness.

"Yes," he agreed, and added surprisingly: "Smoky Eyes!"

No other word of endearment had passed between them so that the name spoken so abruptly acquired quaintness and significance. There was freshness and tenderness about it. It sung on a hushed note. They smiled serenely at each other, amused and interested. Both recognised that through their lazy gossip had run a murmur of mysteries like that of the river. But their quiet was undisturbed and neither made any attempt to become sentimental or make further use of the opening. Their gossip ceased, however, and they gave themselves up completely to reflective and unveiled observation.

Kingsclere realised that he had been watching, unconsciously, the manner in which she was building up a personality for him. She worked steadily and

openly, with careful yet assured strokes, like a painter wielding his brush. Her frankness was flattering and artistic. She did not stoop to attempt deceit, but said: I am fascinating you, and this is how I am doing it. In this she proclaimed herself a clever reader of character, for no one could have appreciated more the spectacle of the creation of a woman than Kingsclere, creator of a man. Perhaps, he mused, it was this secret of his which enabled him to see so clearly and understand so well the task she was about. Perhaps it was his secret which made him admire rather than scorn. Everybody, of course, built from within the individual the world saw, but in their cases the process was more deliberate, and the results more artificial. Was that the bond between them?—the secret of their mutual attraction? He believed it was, and fancied that her instinct had detected something macabre, something strange, about the personality of Lou Kingsclere which in addition to gripping her attention had inspired the plan to which she worked.

All this could be no more than hazy conjecture, and yet the very uncertainty added poignancy to the emotions aroused by the first close human contact in his new life.

The table was a band of coolness between them. They leaned upon it, each looking at the other with deep and baffled attention. The dim light played tricks so that Leila's face—the slumberous eyes, the long mouth with its decisively gashed lips, the straight brows, the chipped nose, the square chin—showed distinctly as if cut in ivory and framed in the ebony oval of her hair. But the night intervened

then, blending the whiteness of her neck, arms and shoulders and the silver of her gown into one dim piece, so that her head seemed to rise gallantly from an unhewn block of marble chaste and cool yet keenly alive in its still strength.

But he paid her no more compliments save the tribute of his close regard which she returned, unabashed and grave.

They remained so, listening to the river, until young Kennedy burst in, bringing the heat and noise of the garish box where the puppets had ceased to move and across which the musicians filed with bent shoulders as if abashed by the sudden gift of silence.

"Hullo, you two, having a staring match?" young Kennedy asked, and whirled on without waiting for an answer: "Gosh, it's hot in there—isn't it, Nin?" He mopped his face. "Do let's have a drink. I was hoping you'd have one warming on the hob—or cooling as the case may be. *Garçon!*" He bubbled with energy and let it flow for their benefit, feeling that he had neglected them a trifle and that they were finding the proceedings dull. Ninon supported his efforts. She was all smiles and tiny curling, rubbing movements and chatter in French and broken English. She displayed chubby knees and gay garters. Between them Ninon and young Kennedy made the table much more lively.

In time the musicians filed back wiping their mouths and looking unutterably depressed. The violinist turned his great dark eyes in homage to the stout lady, who applauded violently, while her partner, embarrassed, paid for the band's drinks and the local residents smirked because the Englishman

—who had no doubt made much money out of the war—had been caught, they knew, for two bottles of champagne.

"I say, do come and have a dance, Leila!" urged young Kennedy. "This'll be the last. They always have a final spot at somebody's expense to get properly sparking for it."

She shook her head and answered: "I'm quite happy, thanks. Just let me sit here—that's all I want. You two carry on. We've been admiring you. You dance so well together."

"But don't you want to dance either, Kingsclere?"

"No—not for me, thanks. I'm not used to this Saigon heat. Go on—don't waste the music."

Before young Kennedy could decide why he felt uneasy, Ninon pinched his knee and her purring voice echoed prettily: "Not waste mu-seek!"

Abstractions ceased to matter.

"You're a funny, mouldy old pair," he told them cheerfully. "Come on, Nin——!"

They went back to their box, Ninon holding his elbow confidingly so that it pressed against the warm softness of her breast.

The disturbance had subsided. The river murmured again.

"Of course, they're young," said Leila, "but I don't think I should ever have cared to live in that way—all upon the surface." She spoke in a level voice and with a manner which suggested that she was confirming ideas they had already discussed. "I think—I'm sure—that secrets are the salt of life. If those children had known how amused we've been—if our souls were like shop-windows through which

they could see all our goods inside—half the zest would have gone. No—I like my secrets. They give me a world which is all me, and quite apart from the unsatisfactory outer world of other people. Naturally every one has secrets, but that is not enough. You must be conscious of what fun they are, what they mean to you, their value. It is so easy to talk; so much harder and wiser to be silent—to make yourself a riddle." She paused, and Kingsclere saw her brows lift in quizzical wisdom. "Am I not right?" she asked.

He nodded slowly. "Yes," said he. "I know what you mean. Secrets! . . ." Her words overawed him. What did she know? What did she guess? What witchcraft was in the night?

"It's secrets which make life an adventure. If it was all revealed there would be nothing in it. We do this, that and the other because of the secrets of our hearts. Then the poor onlookers, who can only see the outside, lift up their hands in astonishment and cry: 'Fancy anyone doing such a thing!—how inexplicable is human nature!' Ah, but Louis, if it wasn't —how dull! It is the same with everything! Your Pacific is just another part of the globe and probably no more romantic than this. But there is a secret in you which will take you there, even though you yourself may hardly know what it is. Secrets are the divine leaven in the bread of life. They are the attributes of a god, for can you imagine a god who was not, primarily, a great secret?"

She ceased for a time, that she might dream over secrets. The river spoke on, whispering through the glimmer of the lights into the darkness again.

Kingsclere sat enthralled. This wisdom made her a part of him; he lost the sense of another personality. He seemed to be communing with his own heart.

"The miracle of the privacy of the human soul!" she went on. "Anybody may see what we do—nobody can ever see what we really think or what we really are. You and I appreciate that, and so we are exciting adventures to each other. I am full of secrets. Each man thinks he finds them out, but that is an illusion. I think you would be wiser. You would prefer me to keep my secrets, as I prefer to, remaining a mystery, an adventure."

She let her head fall back a little so that the light caught it more fully. Her eyes closed, and the long lashes lying on her cheeks completed the enigma of her face. The pose was not false or strained, for it admitted it was the final stroke in the portrait she painted for him. She made herself a symbol.

"Yes," said Kingsclere quietly, "that expresses it. I have been wondering what would. You are a mystery, an adventure!"

They had gone so far with so few words that he did not feel impelled to say any more, though he had recognised that she was the very purpose for which he had created Lou Kingsclere. She stood for all the subtle meanings of his new life; she was different, beautiful, strange, exotic, a little evil, dangerous, the breath of the poppy. She troubled and soothed; she could give pain and joy. The secret laughter with which he had lived had been robbed of its value because he had laughed alone. There had seemed to be no other way. She provided another way—a

way hidden and peculiar as the subject of his mirth. Here was one with whom he could laugh, while holding her spellbound because she did not know at what they laughed together. She had the sensitive palate to appreciate such delicate fare. And she was the wonder for which he had been blindly seeking through all the wonder of his days.

The musicians were working up to their final flurry.

"Never let me know your secret—never!" she warned.

He was not surprised that she knew he had one particular secret.

"Not even in exchange for yours?"

"I am not a fool. I do not trade secrets. Why try to despoil you by despoiling myself?"

She advanced her face across the inches which separated them, and put her lips to his with a firm, sealing pressure. Their hands continued to rest, open, upon Pierre's marble table, but their mouths remained together, eloquent and yet dumb, telling so much and holding so much back.

Thereafter they retreated into their chairs without a word, and regarded each other in mute astonishment, so that it seemed the magic they had worked had aroused a controlled excitement more intense than any accompanied by the hammering of blood and floods of passionate protestations.

The music stopped. The stout lady called thickly for cheers for the band. Through the uncharitable silence her exasperated escort was heard to remark: "Oh, for God's sake, Emily! For God's sake—!" He spoke with much feeling.

And then the gale of young Kennedy and Ninon raged about them again.

"I say, Kingsclere, what a dreadful fool that old trout's making of herself. She's from your ship, isn't she?"

Somehow Ninon had felt during that last dance as if she had nothing on. Young Kennedy was exhilarated.

"What——?" asked Kingsclere, blinking. "Oh, yes, I fancy she is."

"Here, I say!—I believe you two have been asleep!"

"Ver' rude," said Ninon with angelical pertness. "Not sleep—not together!"

Young Kennedy laughed. "You cheeky brat—!" he said, and, pouring the last of the wine into their glasses: "We've earned this. We haven't been slacking about like you two. No wonder you've found it dull. Serve you right!"

The shadow of a smile passed between Leila and Kingsclere.

The car took them back to Saigon through a sleep-wrapped world haunted by wraiths of mist. Eager for his bed the Annamite driver kept his bare brown foot hard down on the throttle. The banks of trees and the white band of road sliding by combined with the steady rush of cool air to make it seem that the night flowed in a dark river. Cattle grazing by the way raised their heads and in the brilliance of the lights their eyes glowed like emeralds. A heavy, wet smell rose from the ricefields and the breath of the jungle was sweet. In the front seat Ninon and young Kennedy, with indefatigable industry, curled

and kissed and clung and whispered. But this activity did not communicate to Leila and Kingsclere. They sat quite still, side by side, their joined hands on Leila's lap, their eyes looking into the darkness beyond the headlamps. It was not until they had gone some distance that Leila, for no apparent reason, turned to Kingsclere. There was about the movement a spontaneity, an air of sudden and complete giving. He took her in his arms and they kissed with fierce straining passion. Her cool arms curled about his neck, and drew his mouth against hers with all her strength. Then she released him, placed his arm about her, put her head on his breast with a sigh of content and lay quite still. His teeth had cut her upper lip and a tricklet of blood ran from it. But she made no complaint. She rested against him in satisfied tranquillity.

They dropped Ninon first at the little hotel she favoured, and while young Kennedy was taking a prolonged farewell Leila suggested it might be tactful if Kingsclere got out next at the Continental.

"The host has been rather overlooked," she pointed out. "Our evening is complete. . . ."

"Yes, Leila," he answered, "our evening is complete."

He was untroubled by jealousy, doubt or desire. She was right. They had to leave their evening exactly as it was.

They did. The parting was no more than a brief word and a brief smile. No one could ever have guessed their secret.

Young Kennedy certainly did not. But his mind was busy. Ninon's sweetness did not endure. Now that

she was no longer in his arms he realised with alarm that he might have been over-attentive to her. She was a wonderful little thing, but she was not Leila. The events of the evening appeared in a new perspective. The drive had blown the fumes from his head. He began to feel foolish. These considerations kept him silent during the short ride to the annexe with Leila at his side. But, although he reasoned he had been only doing her bidding in giving poor little Ninon a good time, conscience was unquiet.

The car stopped and in silence they entered the deserted hall. The place looked naked, chill and forlorn in the dimmed light.

"Look here, Leila," young Kennedy began hurriedly, "I hope you understand that I——"

Leila had turned and faced him, her hand on the end of the banister.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I understand."

The words were innocent enough, but their tone increased his dismay. She was jealous! Before he could speak she read his thoughts.

"I'm not such a silly that if I were jealous I'd show it," she told him, and as she did so he saw clearly, as if she had pointed to it, the cut on her lip. "No, my child—oh, no!" He winced at that. "I've had a delightful evening and I thank you for the setting, the ride and the drinks. But above all else I thank myself for having had the sense to bring poor little Ninon along. It made all the difference to the party!"

While she spoke she mounted to the first step and watched him. She saw him quiver with shame and pain keener than a grown man's given ten times the

justification, because his emotions were nearer to the pains and shames of childhood. Her glance continued to rest steadily on him until the pageant of his face changed to mere anger and his lips ceased to tremble and began to shape expostulations.

"Good-night, Ken," she said then in her sweetest voice, and the attention went out of her expression. She turned and ascended the stairs, moving easily, her silver frock swinging about her legs. To young Kennedy she looked like a slightly bored lady leaving the stalls at the conclusion of a show.

"Well, I'm damned," he gasped, gazing after her.

The remark revealed that young Kennedy did not appreciate the situation.

CHAPTER VIII

They had taken the risk of an anti-climax and had gone to Pierre's again hoping to find it the same. Pierre had not failed them, for he had no difficulty in satisfying patrons who merely demanded monotony. Even the atmosphere of a past hour could be re-captured at his cabaret. The river still murmured by the little table, and the lights and the stars were still in the branches. Nothing was changed—not even the threads which they gathered up, though these had grown more familiar to their fingers and dearer to their hearts. The dancers continued to walk and pause and turn in the white box of the room as if two days and nights had failed to lessen their tireless activity. But neither young Kennedy nor Ninon was among them now.

The fact flashed oddly upon Kingsclere as he ceased speaking. It made the question he had just asked seem even stranger by recalling the brief and stormy interview at which young Kennedy, white with indignation, had accused him of stealing the affection of the girl to whom the visitor had been introduced in the cause of hospitality. Like an echo Kingsclere heard himself answering: "Yes, I have. She's mine now. I've taken her. What's the use of me saying I'm sorry? I had to have her. But I can tell you this, Kennedy: I'm doing you a good turn. She'd have ruined you. Don't you see she's as quietly dangerous as a plug of dynamite? Don't you see the

kind of girl she is? Yes, Kennedy, in this matter—though quite unintentionally—I'm your best friend." Young Kennedy, in his heart impressed, had insisted in remaining angry. He had protested that such a statement added hyprocrisy to offence. Why did Kingsclere want her if she was the kind of girl he painted? And to this Kingsclere had shaken his head in helpless silence. Young Kennedy had stormed off—his vanity more hurt than either heart or faith in human nature, both of which he believed to be fatally stricken—with the opinion on his lips that lies were the fitting sequel to treachery. Kingsclere, looking out on the Rue Catinat, had sympathised with young Kennedy and had admitted that the attitude was justified. But nothing could alter the truth of what he had said. Leila was as he had described her, and he would take her away. He accepted the adventure, marvelling greatly at it and at the joy and content with which it filled him.

That had happened on the morning after their first visit to Pierre's. Strange that it should recur to him again in the pause while Leila considered his offer, and stranger still to realise that she had no idea of the incongruous memories which played behind the curtain of his earnest face.

She allowed him to wait, but not in suspense because there was perfect understanding between them. When she spoke her voice came to him with beautiful quietness and her eyes were deep pools.

"Of course, Louis, I shall go with you."

They smiled together, and his hands covered hers, not in amorous relief but in calm acceptance.

"You knew I was going to ask you?"

"Naturally—when you suggested coming here again. But I knew long before that—I knew the very first night we met."

"Yes," he nodded. "So did I."

"But you don't know why I'm going, or why you want to take me."

"I do: I love you; you love me."

She inclined her head in assent.

"Yes, we know that much, and it is all we need to know. Love takes us both, and love respects secrets." Her tone changed. She pleaded for a little favour, for the satisfaction of a whim. "I think I should like you to marry me," she said—a suggestion not a stipulation. "It would make it different—more wonderful, solid. Will you? Can you?"

"I will marry you," said Louis Kingsclere. He was glad she had said that. He wanted to marry her. Marriage seemed such a substantial, practical bond with which to encircle their mysterious unity. But from its very nature—from the very sanity of its ties—marriage awakened the first doubt in him. It spoke of reality; their love was of a dream, of the life of Louis Kingsclere. He was daunted. "In the past——" he began hesitantly, but he could not go on. To explain would have shattered everything.

"The past is past," she said. "I no more care what is in your past than you care what is in mine. We start afresh to-day. The past is past and dead. If it wasn't why should I be talking of marriage? I take you as you are—you take me as I am." She lulled doubt; she made fantasy appear wise and normal and safe. "Look!" she said. They had eaten supper, and the salt cellar remained on the table. She picked it

up and tipped its contents out. Having thrown a pinch over her shoulder she put her firm, white hands on the salt and patted it into shape. He watched in silence while her fingers worked. She took the wooden spoon and stuck it upright at the head of the oblong white mound. "*Voilà!*" she cried, looking up at him with a quick flash of animation, "the salty grave of the Past—we bury the past at Pierre's. I have always wanted to do that. I have done it now. I am happy."

"And I——!"

Her robe of reserve fell from her, and she was merry and sparkled like a child at a party. Her eyes shone; her lips softened into most tender merriment. With head on one side she looked at him as if in the midst of a gay little song sung for him alone.

"The stupid past!—the sordid past!—the dead past! Kiss me over the grave of the past we have buried, dear heart!" she laughed.

They kissed again at Pierre's, and her mouth against his told only of joy and love which was all she intended to tell him and all he wished to learn.

Pierre, surveying his kingdom, saw happy lovers in the popular secluded table by the stream. He waited until the kiss was over, and then, while they might be expected to be still excited and well-pleased with his cabaret, appeared before them, replenished their glasses and stood bowing his oiled head, caressing his hands, oozing bonhomie.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "mademoiselle would like the band to play something?—the waltz, soft, sweet?" An eloquent gesture expressed the magic of the music it would be his delight to conjure up.

Leila's laugh rippled again.

"Why, yes—let's have the Funeral March!"

Pierre mastered his pained surprise.

"But mademoiselle makes the joke——!" he protested.

"No, I'm quite serious. There's been a funeral in your place to-night, Pierre, if you did but know it. However, it doesn't matter. Don't trouble the band. We'll make our own music and drink our own wine!"

Mocking gravity descended upon her face. Pierre was not pleased. He murmured vague regrets and went away, finding comfort in the thought that the sanity of his clients was no concern of his.

Leila raised her glass.

"To our mysteries and adventures, oh my dear," she said. "To Mr. and Mrs. Louis Kingsclere."

They drained the wine, wondering.

"Pay the bill, Louis, and let's get away," Leila ordered suddenly, taking his hand as if to romp with him out of Pierre's into the night. "My God, we're a mad pair, but it's adorable madness, and I want to love you till I ache."

The river continued to whisper to the empty chairs. A boy appeared to clear the table. He looked at the mound of salt with expressionless, tilted eyes, and, having removed the spoon, scraped it carefully into his yellow palm and poured it back into the cellar.

CHAPTER IX

Leaning on the rail at Leila's side, her shoulder touching his, Kingsclere looked down upon a world in which he was interested but from which he demanded nothing. His sense of isolation, of mental and spiritual difference from his fellows, was stronger than ever now, but he was lonely no more. He had found a comrade to enjoy his secret without sharing it.

The girl who was his wife—he could hardly credit that yet—spoke in her level, reflective voice.

"Like an ant-hill and a parrot-cage rolled into one, isn't it?"

She delighted him with her instinctive response to his mood. It was always thus; she seemed to read his thoughts, to have her finger constantly on the pulse of each passing emotion.

"Yes, people do fuss so!"

But they did not fuss. They said no more, quietly enjoying their unity of attitude towards life and mankind. A breath, a subdued sigh of content, escaped from Kingsclere's lips. Leila would be with him always now. It was her power which wrapped about them, even in the midst of confusion, the silver peace of the sky.

The departure of the Massageries Maritimes liner *Charlemagne,* as one of the events of Saigon's social week, had drawn the customary throng. A slip of moon floated low among creased sheets of cloud.

Electric arc-lamps bathed the T-shaped landing stage and the muddy olive water of the river in intense white light, giving the scene a theatrical effect heightened by the flat masses of the trees still and clear-cut above the buildings on the shore. Down the short strip of road cars and rickshas poured through clouds of dust. They halted in rows and stared at the ship with round eyes, their passengers, bare-headed and clad in white, joining the groups on the jetty or—with much mopping of brows—mounting the steep gangway. The brown people turned up oval faces. A cluster of trim army officers had as its centre two of their comrades returning to France. They were boisterous. One sang a snatch of song which had some application to set them all laughing. They stamped about slapping their thighs and flashing white teeth. Further along, at the stern, Chinese farewelling a countryman in the steerage were frightening away evil spirits by means of crackers. The staccato rattle of explosions was appropriate to the general atmosphere, and the *Charlemagne's* decks were a turmoil of movement, talk and animation.

Another car, its horn sounding, appeared between the sheds. Before it had stopped a man sprang out and hurried towards the gangway. Leila noticed him and roused herself, remarking between annoyance and distant amusement: "Oh, bother! I'll have to leave you for a little, Louis dear. Here's a stupid old creature come to say good-bye. He's a bore and speaks no English so I shan't inflict him on you. He's the last echo of those far-off days when I was a member of a light opera company. He should be dead really, shouldn't he? I suppose he's angry with me

for running off without telling him." She laughed briefly. "Well, I'll just silence the echo. Shan't be long, sweetheart—so sorry!"

She put her arm round him in an affectionate hug of apology. He nodded unquestioning agreement and she walked leisurely away, the smile still playing about her face, but with the affection fading from it so that it became a mere ironic and anticipatory twist of the lips.

The echo from yesterday, having ascended from the lower deck by way of an inner stairway, met her at the door of the music saloon. She paused, nonchalant and balanced.

"This, my dear Georges, is an unexpected pleasure," she declared in French.

Georges was a tower of a man with a beard so black and thick that it looked like a disguise but through which his lips showed nakedly. They were red and wet. He had heavy-lidded eyes, a heavy paunch and a fleshy nose, and though attired as a staid citizen his very essence was that of a Phallic symbol.

"Ah!" he cried, checking and glaring down at her from beneath bushy brows. His face was flushed with exertion and choler. Its colour deepened. He found her poise maddening, almost incredible.

"And you," he burst out, "I wish to talk to you!" He snatched out his handkerchief, and wiped his mouth in its black frame.

"But certainly! It is my desire to listen. Let us go to the other side where it will be pleasanter for our little chat. Come!"

Humming a dance air she turned and led the way through a space in the deck-houses and between the

hot funnels. Georges, having hesitated a moment, moved heavily after her, frowning at the back of her head in numb wrath. He looked puzzled, helpless, like a man who suddenly found himself so full of words and the desire for action that he was paralysed. They emerged on a quiet space of deck where the only people were those passing hurriedly towards bar or cabins. The river flowed by, its waters pierced at intervals by quivering golden spears of light from sampans and junks. The far shore showed as a smudge picked out with points of fire. They had escaped from the crowds, and the noise was mellowed into a blur of sound through which the crackers stuttered.

Leila took up a position near the bow of a boat, and, leaning against the rail in an easy attitude, looked at Georges with mocking attention. He tied his handkerchief into a knot and wrenched at its ends.

"A cigarette, please, Georges. It helps talk so. And I have always loved your—your cigarettes."

An inarticulate sound choked in his throat, but he thrust the handkerchief away and snapped open his case. The hinged lid exaggerated the trembling of his hand as he held it out, and when he struck a match she laid her fingers on his to hold it steady. "Pardon," she said, " but you will burn my nose." And then, brightly, her face sweet in the rosy light: "And so, Georges, you have heard the news?"

He flung the match away and pointed his unlit cigarette at her.

"My God, what kind of a woman are you?" he demanded.

Leila shrugged.

"I should have said you have had the time and the

opportunity to find that out for yourself, my dear Georges. One cannot be the beauty spot and the guide, also."

"Yes! Yes! Yes!—you are right. I had time enough. But it seems that I had to go to Lang Bian for a fortnight's shooting to find you out thoroughly."

"A tribute to my womanly powers!"

He clenched his fists against his breast, the bent cigarette rising absurdly out of his right hand. "Shooting——! It is you I should have shot!" he declared thickly. "Yes, you——! I go away for fourteen days *and* nights and return to find you married to an English pig!"

"Oh, Georges," she pleaded, "you do not think that Leila would marry a pig? You are quite wrong —he is not a pig. He is a darling. You see how little you know——!"

He stamped angrily on the deck and struck his chest. "It is you that drives me desperate, insane. It is you! Did I not give you everything?—every little wish? Was I not kindness itself? Bah, if I had not had the great passion for you it would have been better with me. But I gave you everything. Are you never satisfied?"

She gazed frankly up into his furious eyes.

"No," she said, "never."

He writhed, impotently.

"No—that is it! You are faithless, impossible, heartless. You are enjoying this—you drink up my pain as if it were wine. You smile divinely at me, knowing what I suffer. If I did not suffer you would scoff at me and leave me. It would have been the

great disappointment for you if I had not got back in time to provide you with this pleasant spectacle. You demand your wedding gift from me—behold, I give it!" Again he beat his breast. "Oh, yes, I know you now when it is too late. My God, how I detest you! And if I had whipped you before as I could whip you now—as I intended to before you got me between finger and thumb—then you might have stayed with me, then you might have loved me. You double pervert! You masochist and sadist. No, you are never satisfied. Never! Bah!" But his accusations were made in a voice vibrant with despair, for his sufferings were too keen to allow him to be merely angry. The storm of words ceased. He took a step to the rail, spat and flung his cigarette away with violence as if with it he tried to fling all that she still meant to him. His attack failed completely. Leila's defences were impregnable. She remained impersonal and interested. He was a figure in a play.

"I am not wise like you," she remarked. "I do not know these big words of sex. I am what I wish to be."

He remained in stormy silence for a moment, his red lips working.

"You are incomprehensible! You give me the desire to tear away your masks with my nails." His fingers clawed the air before her face, but Leila did not move. "Tell me what made you do this? Why did you marry him? What is the secret of it all?"

Leila took a last puff at her cigarette, dropped it on the deck and crushed it out with her toe, while she considered these questions at her leisure.

"The secret is my secret," she said, calmly dis-

cussing an abstract point. "But consider, my dear friend, how falsely you flatter yourself. You could never have held me—no, not even with that whip you have just thought of. You think you are a clever one, but you are a great fool. Look at yourself a moment, Georges, and ask what there is about you to hold me." Her elbows rested on the rail, her hands opened simply, appealing to his reason. "You are just a big, healthy animal and as easy to read as a child. From the first night your simplicity has amused me. Regard me!—You with your Kraft-Ebbing and your Freud and your Havelock Ellis that you quote. These people have taught you the big words. Experience has taught you the tricks. But nothing has taught you that sex is a mystery. And you as a mystery, my dear friend! . . . I ask again that you consider yourself and discover what there is about you to mystify a schoolgirl of twelve who had discussed sex, without big words, with her companions!"

Her slightly raised brows, her logical air, submitted the point to his consideration. The man she baited had been driven beyond endurance. His face was wet; his mouth was twisted; murder was in his eyes.

The intensity of his feeling made an explosion seem inevitable. But she chided him with upraised finger.

"Come, Georges, you must not be too liberal with me," she urged. "Do not give me the final satisfaction of seeing you make a farcical scene in which you will figure as the discarded lover."

He groaned aloud. The warning was effective,

however. She was so horribly right. Better to be mocked by her than by her and all Saigon. He clenched his fists, and turned away, pacing up and down the deck with his head bowed while he fought to regain self-control. Leila remained an observant onlooker. After a space he was able to face her again and to speak, holding himself in grim restraint.

"And this Englishman—he is a mystery?"

"Since you've ceased to matter I don't mind telling you, my dear, that he is. To me he is a great mystery, and I shall keep him so. He is different—he is not just a man made of common flesh and blood like you —there is something very strange about him. He is unreadable, inscrutable, like the night." She made a gesture towards the darkness on stream and shore, tormenting him the while with the dreams in her half-closed eyes.

He broke into a melodramatic gust of laughter and snapped his fingers, but he could not conceal the hunger she roused in him nor the agony of his thwarted desires. Though Leila knew there was no more to be said she continued to talk to her dear friend because he amused her, having, at last, ceased to be merely a rich old bore.

Meanwhile Kingsclere had found entertainment watching the café, which, as the *Charlemagne* was French territory, was on deck beneath an awning. The terrasse habitués took their setting to sea with them, and the scene reproduced that outside the Continental Palace, but in a concentrated form which intensified every feature. The noise of high voices and laughter seemed louder and more persistent, the gesticulations more emphatic and general, the sense

of abounding energy wasted on nothing, dissipated, was stronger. There was much embracing, kissing and slapping of shoulders. Corks popped and toasts were drunk with a clinking of glasses. Ladies of every hue, both in complexion and character, made a great display of silk-clad legs and rounded arms. Dark eyes were busy giving and receiving. The reek of scent, oil, cigars and perspiration hung in the hot, still air like a fog. The voluble bar steward dashed about, flinging people out of his way, and loudly calling God to witness the impossibilities demanded of him by clamorous and thirsty souls.

Kingsclere, amused, was not conscious of young Kennedy's presence until he spoke.

"Hullo!" Young Kennedy, rather shamefaced, extended his hand. Kingsclere took it. "I say, I've come to apologise. I couldn't let you go away without doing that. I've been kicking myself all day—ever since I heard of the wedding. I didn't know you thought as much of her as all that. If I'd known I'd have understood. You might have told me, and asked me along. Why keep it such a secret?" He was excited, bubbling with interest.

"Oh, I don't know—there didn't seem to be any sense in making a great noise about it. And after what you'd said I couldn't very well expect to have you as best man."

"Sorry to have been such a chump——!"

"You weren't a chump. If anybody was in the wrong of course I was. Let's have a drink and forget about it."

Capturing the steward and seeing that their order was not claimed by others prevented connected talk,

but when, possessed of a bottle and glasses, they moved to the port side where the crowd was less dense, young Kennedy, studying Kingsclere with mystified eyes, remarked: "Who'd ever have thought that a quiet, solid chap like you would have been so sudden? I can't get over it!" He shook his head from side to side.

"No one was more surprised than I," said Kingsclere, handing him a filled glass from the rail which they were using as a table.

Young Kennedy raised it.

"Well, here's luck to the happy couple anyway. All the best." They drank. "Ah, that's better—I was damn' dry," he proceeded, brightening. Kingsclere held the bottle out. "Yes, thanks—not over the rim. You know you were quite right, I—well, here's luck again!—I'd never have been able to manage Leila not even if she'd have had me, which I don't believe for a moment. She's not my type. I recognise that now. Well, we may as well finish it, I suppose. Cheerio!" He was distinctly bright now, and approached the important part of his speech with zest. "You know, Kingsclere, an ordinary little girl like Ninon's more my line. And when I say 'ordinary' I don't mean anything against Ninon, mind you. Gosh, Kingsclere, there's a little darling if you like! The softest, sweetest, cheeriest little soul you'd ever meet. And straight as they're made. She was telling me only the other night that if she ever gets married she'd tell the man everything. That shows she's a good sort, doesn't it?"

"Yes," agreed Kingsclere with perfect gravity.

"Oh, she's a real girl! I don't think you saw much

of her that night, but if you had you'd agree with me. She's a wonder—really she is!"

His enthusiasm was beautiful. Kingsclere wanted to smile, for he remembered another of young Kennedy's pæans of praise—that which had preceded the appearance of the girl called Leila. He wanted to smile—but at himself. It seemed so odd that young Kennedy should have been the instrument chosen for changing the course of Louis Kingsclere's life.

"I don't doubt it. And so it's Ninon, I suppose, you're going to marry now when you get your rise?"

Young Kennedy welcomed the question. He grinned, shook his head and looked wise.

"No, old man, not Ninon! No marriage for me! And she's not quite the type—what?"

"Um—maybe you're right," Kingsclere acquiesced, but he was thinking of the strangeness of his love for Leila which could allow him, coolly and without alarm, to harbour the idea that perhaps young Kennedy was not as grateful for his escape as he had cause to be.

"I say, where is she?—where's Leila?" The question was a mere formality. He had no wish to meet her.

Kingsclere looked about and saw the two figures further along the deck.

"There she is. That Frenchman came to see her off. She had to have a talk with him." Though he had not given a thought to the identity of the stranger he added conversationally: "I've an idea he's the manager of the opera crowd she was with."

"I suppose so," young Kennedy agreed tactfully,

but he knew the large man had nothing to do with that unfortunate enterprise and, in his new-found wisdom about women, guessed much to which the doting bridegroom was blind. It occurred to him that although Leila and Kingsclere were so deep, he himself was rather like that chap—or was it a girl? —in the Bible who had chosen the better part.

The last gong sounded. He embraced the opportunity to escape, for the recollection of his parting from Leila still rankled, and though he had come nerved to meet her, he was glad enough to be spared.

"Well, I've got to be shoving along," he said, above the heightened babel. "I shan't worry Leila. Just tell her I came down and that I wished her all the best." They shook hands. "Good-bye, old man, and every kind of good luck!"

And as he went he thought, with an amused maliciousness which was only human, that Louis Kingsclere, married, would probably need all the luck anyone could wish him.

The tide set towards the gangway, and the café emptied. The steward surveyed the debris and wiped his face with a soiled napkin. His air of melancholic exhaustion matched the atmosphere of the place. But, unable to remain subdued for long, he roused himself, poured a torrent of abuse at his native assistants, and went from table to table collecting the unfinished bottles, the light returning to his eye.

Kingsclere resumed his place at the rail. The jetty now was paved with upturned faces. The siren whooped. Farewells were cried to and fro. Already a tricklet of people flowed back to the town. Young Kennedy had gone. Kingsclere imagined him riding

in a ricksha along the Rue Catinat to his Ninon. He mused on the queerness of such meetings and partings. To him young Kennedy was done with as completely as if he had died. He had played his part and ceased. But young Kennedy would go on through the years with the absorbing business of his own life until he became old Kennedy. Obvious, but strange if one thought about it. The crackers stuttered in a sudden burst of renewed energy.

"It's shameful the way I've neglected you," said Leila at his side.

He turned and gazed at her hungrily, surprised to find how much he had been missing her. The echo of the past had been satisfactorily silenced. No memory of it remained. She was radiant with love and tenderness.

"It is good to have you with me again," he said.

"It is good to be with you."

She linked her arm through his and her cool fingers closed over his hand which rested on the rail.

"Young Kennedy came down."

"Did he? I'm sorry I missed him. He would have been so funny. We are forgiven, then?"

"Ninon seems to be consoling him most adequately."

"Yes, Ninon will do that," Leila agreed, and again: "I'm sorry I missed the fun of seeing him."

"Why fun?" he asked, carelessly.

She shrugged.

"Oh, I don't know. It might have been amusing. He would have been so terrified of me, that young Kennedy."

The hawsers leapt towards the ship, curled in-

wards, collapsed with a splash into the river. The triangle of golden water, which had appeared below, grew, gradually developed into a long slanting strip. The figures on the jetty lost distinction and merged into a band of whiteness. A bunch of crackers spluttered and jumped on the water astern. Thin cries still pursued, and voices shouted from a sister ship lying in the next berth, the heads of cooks, stewardesses and natives appearing at unexpected apertures in the vessel's side. Saigon and its lights and noise floated away upstream.

"I'm going to straighten up the cabin, Louis—own," Leila announced. "I'll join you later. No! No! Don't offer to help. You'd only be in the way."

"Can't it wait?"

"I may as well get it done. It'll be nicer on deck presently."

She pressed her head against his shoulder for an instant and left him.

The telegraph tinkled down in the engineroom and the pulsations of the *Charlemagne's* heart grew stronger and steadier. The moon had set. Beyond the web of light about the ship—which revealed the water fanning out from the bows in bulging folds—misty darkness had closed down. Occasionally a buoy winked. In the smoke-room a few noisy spirits carried on the celebrations, shouting at intervals and breaking into snatches of song, but a quiet had fallen on the decks and Kingsclere had them to himself, the other passengers being busy or wearied by the festivities. He lit his pipe and paced up and down. Their voyage had begun and the fact had a deep signi-

ficance. For the first time since he had met Leila he faced the position. He had embarked now, finally. There could be no going back. The port of the past was closed to him. He could never return and become the man he had been. Now that he had put it away forever he realised how constantly, without being aware of it, he had soothed conscience with the plea that presently he would end his masquerade. The illusion that this false life was but a temporary thing had always been with him. Now he had to admit that it was permanent. While he had been calling the past dead he had been thinking of it as stunned. But at last, indeed, it was dead. There could be no compromise.

He brooded over the grave, wondering who was buried there and what had been the consequences of the murder he had done. The lost loves and hopes and joys which he had believed to be left far behind drew suddenly nearer in that moment of final parting. He beheld the treachery and cowardice of which he had been guilty, and with the word Farewell! tolling in his soul, yearned and mourned like a man awakened too late to the virtues of the one he had misjudged and slain, and to the reality of his crime.

The revellers passed him making unsteady ways to their bunks, but Kingsclere continued his tramping. Later as he passed the smokeroom the steward stepped out, glared as if daring him to give an order, slammed the door, turned the key, and went to his rest. Lights were switched out, and the ship sunk more completely into the night. She became a living creature feeling her own way down that unseen stream. Loneliness gripped Kingsclere. He felt

the need to be near Leila, and descended to the lower deck. All was still and deserted there. The black squares of the windows looked blankly out at him, and he heard the slow breathing of sleepers. But when he reached the for'ard end and turned on to the strip of deck which ran athwartships he saw that the light still burned in their cabin. He could not go to Leila yet, for he was afraid lest ghosts were in his eyes. These had to be banished, and, conscious of her close at hand, he knew they could be. Accordingly he remained gazing out over the fo'c'slehead into the mysterious depths of darkness beyond the bow. High above the masthead light shone bright and warm. A breeze came, stirring his hair, and bringing a breath of the sea and the challenge of new things.

The *Charlemagne* carried him on. Saigon was far astern; the past was far astern. His mood changed, and he fanned the spark of present happiness assiduously. Leila alone meant more than all the rest. She alone was worth it. Whatever lay buried he could never have been happier than he was as Louis Kingsclere. No matter what had been; no matter even if he had loved—for he had been forced to admit that contingency at last—his present incarnation was isolated and complete in itself as if he had really died and been born again.

They had foresworn the hateful past. They had taken each other as they were, cutting themselves off from the dead days. This was not cowardice but courage. He remembered his talk with the doctor of the *Mithridates*. Cowardice and courage: interchangeable terms according to the point of view.

Courage alone could have been rewarded with such treasures as had come to him: the treasures of freedom and love. He and Leila had dared greatly and would succeed. The lives of other men—born Brown, living Brown's life, loving Brown's love, and dying Brown's death to be buried beneath Brown's tombstone—were the mere spinning of wheels. He had escaped from humanity's routine. Was that nothing?

The snap of an electric switch, a diminishing of the light, aroused him. He turned about. Leila stepped out on to the narrow, dim deck, and came towards him. They were private there, on one hand the empty faces of the cabins, on the other the hazy wall of night.

He held out his hands. The breeze played with the thin silk wrap she wore, making her intangible and ghostly. In the soft radiance which seemed to come from nowhere he saw her face. It was like a star to him, bright, serene and fair. The firmness of her lips had melted; her eyes were deep and calm and grave. She took his fingers, and stood at arms' length, her head bowed a little as if in humility. They remained so, and he worshipped. Then she raised her eyes and met his with a tranquillising, steadying certainty.

"And after all this thought you are not afraid?"

"No, Leila, only conscious of miracles and mysteries."

"Yes," she said, seeming to understand all he meant without any need for words.

Kingsclere tightened his grip on her hands. He was afraid suddenly, stabbed by a fancy that she might dissolve, float quietly away on the breath of

breeze leaving him alone and haunted by the memory of her unreadable soul.

"If I should lose you! . . ." he said aloud, but to his own heart.

Her smile dawned, tender and simple and sweet as a child's.

"I love you so," she sighed. "I love you so. I am going to try so hard!"

With that deliberate grace which always clutched at his senses she moved to him and laid her body against his. Her hands stole up and, pressing caressingly against his cheeks, drew down his face.

"Oh, Louis——!"

She surrendered her body into his arms, and gave him the poppy of her mouth that he might drink peace and forgetfulness and dreams.

The steady tremor of the ship beat through them.

BOOK THREE
THE OUTPOST

CHAPTER X

Darkness enveloped Netherlandia. Sea, shore and hills were lost and the high ranges showed only as a loom against the sky. The stars shone with a diffused radiance. From unseen jungle and unseen bay no sound came, the hush suggesting that the world had drowned in the deluge of darkness.

But man, the pygmy, impudently survived. The brig *Hirondelle,* at anchor, was marked by bright points of light, and from Li-Goon's store a burst of gold exploded with bravado, like a school-boy's squib fired in space. Man, as represented by the gathering on Li-Goon's veranda, was unconscious of this demonstration and of the encompassing night. What happened outside was no concern of his. He was pleasantly occupied with drinks, tobacco and talk of women. These things were of importance. An atom too small to be imagined in the vastness of the universe he yet contrived to create a world of his own within two sides of split bamboo and two of gauze—the latter a necessary defence against mosquitoes which could have destroyed him. In this way he set up proportions appropriate to his queer little life and making it endurable.

They had their drinks.

Outside the night, but within a social oasis peerless in many hundred miles. To Li-Goon's came the handful of whites who made up civilization's outpost in that corner of Dutch New Guinea. It was their club, their forum and their business centre. Lying

back in long chairs with glasses at their elbows and pipes between their teeth, they indulged in the narcotic of endless talk. They were men dwelling in isolation and remote from the clash of ordinary existence. The nearness of the equator made physical effort a penance to be performed when unavoidable. The only muscles used with comfort were those of tongue and throat which could be kept well oiled. Time had ceased in Netherlandia. Watches and clocks rusted in silence. Day followed day, each bringing the gift of to-morrow when steps would be taken to get away, to do this or that, to grapple with the business of life in some more active fashion. The blessed gift solved many problems, and assured that there was always company on the veranda.

The walls, floor, ceiling and furniture of Li-Goon's were built of split bamboo, so that everywhere neat straight lines ran effortlessly to meet other straight lines, forming a soothingly monotonous pattern. The lines were as regular as the bars of a cage. So still was the air that the smoke hung in blue, flat bands. Where skin touched bamboo moisture showed and gradually shrank away. Li-Goon, noiseless and efficient, attended to the glasses. No more effort was needed than the scrawling of a signature on a chit. They cursed Li-Goon at times, but without his establishment Netherlandia would have been unendurable. It was the complement, so to speak, of To-morrow.

Two strangers had been added to the company that night. They had arrived an hour before on the *Hirondelle*—an odd couple, but visitors to the outpost always were, and were always welcomed as refreshing the wells of conversation by giving new life

to old stories and well-worn ideas. Now, although the evening had just begun, one of the newcomers sharply addressed the other.

"Off to bed, Pedro—get out of it. You know the way to Mr. Thompson's house, and you know your room. We're not here for fun, but for the good of your health. Hop it!" A jerk of thumb over shoulder completed the command.

M. Cuvelier, dealer in pearls and paradise plumes, observed the pair with interest. The speaker would have been perfectly in the picture if set in a circus ring with a long whip in his hand and a chain of white ponies—or more savage beasts—flickering around him. He had the air of authority, the heaviness of frame, the imperious eyes of one accustomed to taming and controlling strong but mentally inferior creatures. He was handsome in a burly way, with a heavy jaw and a sensual mouth. His hair was dark and wavy, but escaped curls which would have been the one touch necessary to make him redolent of the sawdust. On the little finger of his right hand he wore a ring set with a diamond, his ducks were well cut, and his shoes of banded doe-skin were over-decorative. In a weaker man the confidence of his manner would have seemed mere swagger, but he achieved complete success with it and made it impressive.

His nimble mind having decided these things, M. Cuvelier turned to see how the order was taken.

It was taken admirably. Pedro, the Filipino, addressed like a child behaved like a child. He rose, lifting his lithe body with one supple, easy movement, and smiled in a manner which was at once

amiable and sulky. His face was so golden, regular and oval that the battered ear which marred one side seemed not to belong to his head. He revealed white teeth each one set in a narrow frame of gold. The brown moistness of his eyes made him appear very sad at leaving them.

"Ver' well," he answered in a gentle voice. "Goo'-night!"

They nodded to him and his smile widened. Then, as if suddenly realising the indignity with which he had been ordered off, he squared his shoulders, and, lifting each in turn jauntily, strutted out, seeking to suggest that the early exit was entirely his own idea. But even this awkward gesture could not disguise his grace. So lightly did he move and with such natural stealth that M. Cuvelier was reminded of a puma padding silently across its cage and into a black hiding place. It amused him to recollect that the docile Pedro could have thrashed any man present with one hand.

He raised his glass.

"Your 'ealth, Mis-tair Bradley," he remarked to the big man. "That protégé of yours, you 'ave 'im well trained!"

Mat Bradley laughed nonchalantly.

"Pedro? I'll say so. And he's got just enough sense to know I'm the man for him. Pedro needs me. He's only a big kid, and if it wasn't for me he'd settle himself. Wants a lot of control. I give it to him—yes, sir! The women, you know—he's a fair hog among the women. And they fall for him, worse luck! That's the chief reason why we're here. He's fussy is Pedro—spoilt. Coloured stuff doesn't appeal

to him these days when white women won't leave him alone, curse them!"

"Ah, the women——!" said M. Cuvelier, his voice rich in sympathy. He lit a cheroot and flung the match away, banishing it. "What a simple world this would be if we could only grow babies on trees and abolish the women! . . ." He sighed deeply.

"Well, when you get your simple world you can live in it yourself—not for mine!" said Boyce, the Australian, his lean jaw thrust out and his hard lips drawn back in a grin, so that his face was skull-like.

"Here, here! Here, here!" said Tom Thompson in dignified support. He tapped approval with his pipe on the arm of his chair. His eyes sparkled behind steel-rimmed glasses, and he nodded his venerable head, a wisp of silver, straight hair falling forward on his brow. He lay back again, clasping his hands over the knob of his dumpling stomach.

"You live in it already," Mat Bradley pointed out with careless contempt. "Barring the tree-babies that is. Why else do you think I'm here with Pedro? Haven't I just told you? I'm here to keep Pedro out of mischief until it's time for us to go south to Sydney. He's got to win his fight there with Jim James—got to! If he doesn't I quit—can't be wasting my time, you know. They say Pedro's never been the same since he was beaten up through twenty rounds by Gonsalez last year. Well, that's as maybe. But if he beats Jim James he comes back, see?—*and* some! That's just what he's going to do. And we lie quiet here to fill in the odd time. Meanwhile I'll get that boy started. He'll show them something at their stadium down there. I was figuring to do this

stop-over in Rabaul, but when Mr. Carrington here told me old Tom Thompson I'd met in Manila might be able to put me up in Netherlandia, why, I jumped at it. Just what I wanted—something quiet, dead!"

He was not complimentary about Netherlandia, but they did not mind. None of them were. They were all going to flee the place to-morrow.

M. Cuvelier looked incredulous.

"You say our Mis-tair Carrington told you something—impossible!" he declared, shooting a glance of friendly mockery at the silent mate of the *Hirondelle*.

Mr. Carrington made no comment, but puffed at his pipe, his long mulish face expressionless, his mouth shutting sharply like a trap. The Frenchman's raillery did not trouble him. He had his own concerns and dwelt within himself.

Bradley laughed.

"I get you—yes, perhaps it'd be more like the truth to say I dragged the information out of him. Mr. Carrington's not much of a talker, eh?" He drained his glass. "Anyway, we're here and that's the main. You seem to make yourselves fairly comfortable in this rum hole. But what do you do with your time at all?"

"Ah," M. Cuvelier explained, "there is no trouble about that. We live on what you would call the smell of the oil rag, we work as little as possible, drink as much as possible, and talk all the time." He grimaced. "We must talk," he pointed out, "otherwise how silent it would be here!"

With raised finger he invited the stranger to

observe the silence as if he exhibited something tangible. Save for the sounds of their own breathing the night was as virgin of noise as the depths of the sea. Mat Bradley moved uneasily, and pursed up his lips in something like dismay.

"Hully smoke," he said, "let's have a drink—and talk up, you fellows!"

"'In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury,'" quoted Evan Jones in his dry, dull voice.

He sat apart in a corner—a small, faded Welshman with bowed shoulders and thin hair. His features were almost Mongolian, and his eyes were those of a dreamer. As was his habit he was conning an account book which accompanied him nightly to that veranda where idleness reigned. But whether this was a protest against the time wasted there none could tell, for Evan Jones was *x* in the mathematics of Netherlandia. No one knew what his thoughts or feelings were, or even whether he was sane or mad. He had always been there; would always be there; was as much a part of the place as the unchanging hills. They accepted him, but paid him no attention. He sat on the edge of their councils, heedless and unheeding. When he opened his mouth it was to deliver a text, but they had grown so accustomed to this trait that they did not realise how often his remarks were apposite. His words, to them, were just a noise, like that of the waters when they lisped on the beach. He dwelt in a ramshackle house with a black cockatoo for companion and the Old Testament for a library. The natives liked him and traded with him, but he was dogged by misfortune, so that

the figures he entered in his little book and conned so steadily could not have shown much profit. The others did not know, nor did they care. But they let him smoke herbal cigarettes for his asthma without protest, and they did not rebuke him when he hummed hymn tunes learned, far away and long ago, in chapel in his homeland.

"Hullo," Bradley exclaimed, "what the devil—?" He looked in surprise at the small man whom he had scarcely noticed before.

M. Cuvelier tapped his brow with a long finger, the nail of which was trimmed and polished.

"It is our little friend, the Evan Jones. 'E is—!" He shook his head in explanation and regret. "'E suffers from the asthma and the religion. 'E means no 'arm." His eloquent hands opened suddenly as an interesting point struck him. "It is strange," he went on, "we grow very religious 'ereabouts. While you were at Thompson's house putting your things in I 'ave 'ad the talk with a native who 'as come back also on *l'Hirondelle*. 'E comes from inland, up in the ranges. Now 'e 'as got religion, too. They 'ave made 'im mad, those missionaries! And with the aid of one, a scientist—a bug-'unting kind of cove, as you would say—who measures 'eads and studied these peoples. Consider, then—this Analoolie, with the arrested mentality of a child, 'e 'as returned with the ideas the most strange. They are Jewish looking, these 'ill people; they are not like most natives. They 'ave sharp faces and 'ooked noses; they wear their 'air in the long, oily ringlets—they would serve as models for brown Shylocks. Observe me, then; this Analoolie 'as 'is 'ead full of nonsense. 'E 'as smat-

terings of religion all mixed up. 'E as snippets of Bible, you follow? And this 'ead-measurer, 'e 'as said something about the Jewish look of this Analoolie—'e 'as jested of the Lost Tribes. The result you ask?"

"We don't," Boyce interjected, and to Bradley: "But there's no stopping Cuvelier once he's under way."

M. Cuvelier waved the interruption aside.

"The result?—it is this: Analoolie 'as decided that 'e is of a Lost Tribe—that 'is people up there back in the ranges, they are wanderers from Israel. 'E 'as no idea, mind you, even of what Israel really means. It is droll. Yet 'e is clever for a native. 'E 'as—what is it?—personality. But arrested mentality, a child's mind in a man's body." His eyes rolled in protest. "These missionaries, they do not allow for that. No—never! They 'ave ruined a boy who might 'ave made the good 'ouse-servant. But, after all, what does it matter?—one 'ouse-boy more or less? And these Lost Tribes—why should not New Guinea 'ave one? I 'ave 'eard that even you British are a Lost Tribe. Well! . . ." He shrugged.

Their tongues wagged on, while glasses were filled, emptied, filled again. The talk was confined to the quartette. When M. Cuvelier appealed impishly to Mr. Carrington for an opinion or support the mate merely took his pipe from his mouth, answered "Ah!" or "Um!"—"Yes," or "No,"—and continued to listen with neutral but unbored attention. Evan Jones lit a cigarette and the sweet, sickly fumes mingled with the more acrid breaths of alcohol and tobacco. Occasionally he contributed a proverb

as if some word of theirs had touched a button which made him speak. They did not hear him. He took out a pencil, totted up a column of figures, entered the total and put the book into his pocket. Apparently his labours were over for the night, but he remained like a shadow of one of the others powerless to move until the party broke up.

Out in the night a drum began to mutter on an excited, exciting note. At its first throb the quiet was shattered. Shrill native voices cried: "Sailo! Sailo!" Bare feet pattered on the dust of the road. The drum over in the marine village of Hakedada beat out its message again and again. It was as if a spell had been lifted, restoring the outpost to life. The release spread to the veranda, where the gathering stirred out of fogs of talk.

"You 'ave come to Netherlandia on a good night, Mis-tair Bradley," M. Cuvelier explained, answering the visitor's surprised inquiry. "This disturbance, it 'as the meaning that the *Geervliet* arrives. She is the steamer who calls 'ere once a month from Batavia and Sourabaya. She is the world. We rejoice that 'er coming means that to-night we shall 'ave the 'eaven of ice with our drinks. The natives?—they rejoice because it is the custom!"

"Just as well I got Pedro off to bed," commented Mat Bradley.

"But will he stay there?" asked Boyce.

"He'll stay, all right."

"What a thing is discipline," breathed M. Cuvelier. "What an admirable thing! I think, Mis-tair Bradley, that we shall 'ave to appoint you manager for all of us."

"And I'd do you good," the other admitted. He stood up stretching his big arms and considering them with critical and appraising eyes.

M. Cuvelier smiled at him, for he almost heard the snap of that long whip and knew that this large, masterful man would have liked very well to have sent Netherlandia's people flickering about him in a well-trained circle, like those white ponies.

"The Filipinos," he asked, seemingly apropos of nothing, "are an easy-going, leisure-loving people, is it not?"

"Lazy as hogs!"

"Ah," said M. Cuvelier laconically.

Beyond the netting wall boys had assembled in readiness for their masters' pilgrimage to iced drinks. They carried lanterns so that the outer dark appeared to have been invaded by a host of giant fireflies. Their clipped chatter drifted in. Out of the distance came a thin, wailing hoot, at which the clamour was renewed.

"There she is," said M. Cuvelier. "Let us now go to the jetty. The crime it would be to drink any more of this warm soup."

But they drained their glasses before they trooped out. Li-Goon watched them go. If he thought them ungrateful and ungracious his face did not betray him. Evan Jones was last. He went alone, humming to himself. The boys formed up about them, the lanterns creating a moving yellow strip of road and a border of black beach. The light fell on shining skins, brown and bare. Shadows moved all about. Above the tiny, bright procession rose heights of darkness through which hot stars looked down. As

they straggled along the men talked of what a difference ice made to drinks, and wondered whether van Rossen, the port officer, would return in the *Geervliet* this trip.

On the jetty the boys formed a circle about their masters and putting the lanterns down crouched on their haunches. Over the black thistledowns of their heads could be seen dimly the remainder of Netherlandia's population, beflowered and wearing their sharks' teeth necklaces for the gala.

M. Cuvelier touched Bradley's arm.

"There is friend Analoolie," he said.

With a nod he indicated a thin, short, wiry man, darker of skin than those about him, who stood just within the pool of radiance. M. Cuvelier had not exaggerated in his description of Analoolie. Ringlets of hair fell to his shoulders, his sharp nose was prominent and hooked, his eyes were dark, and his expression alert and keen. Strength of personality—a suggestion of spirit and assurance—was stamped upon him. Standing there against the blackness he appeared, indeed, as a Lost Tribesman wandered into far Ethiopian lands and fallen into barbarous practices but still inevitably remaining a child of Abraham.

"Makes you feel as if you were trying to pawn your watch," was Mat Bradley's comment.

Finding himself observed Analoolie straightened up with an air and made the sign of the cross. He raised his chin and stared boldly, almost contemptuously, at the Gentiles.

"That's good——!" said Thompson, chuckling down in his stomach. "Fancy having a face like that and pretending to be a Christian."

"Yes," M. Cuvelier agreed gravely, "yes. It is a pity if 'e must play the part that 'e plays it not right, for the part suits 'im. I think I like 'im better as the Lost Tribesman than as the mission-boy. It is more dignified. Yes." He stared thoughtfully until Analoolie, abashed at last, stepped back into the darkness.

Mr. Carrington had fallen into his customary attitude of meditation. He stood, pipe in hand, forgetful of them all, looking up at the stars, his thin face lengthened by the play of light and shadow on it. M. Cuvelier's mischievous and restless mind could not resist the opportunity. He liked the mate, but he also liked bantering him.

"Ah, Mis-tair Carrington, you and your stars," he cried, and in explanation to Bradley: "Our Mis-tair Carrington, 'e is the student of astrology. The 'eavens are a book to 'im—the stars tell 'im wonderful things. Is not that so, Mis-tair Carrington?"

"Yes," the mate answered evenly.

"But one day you must cast my 'oroscope, Mis-tair Carrington. Per'aps it will convert me. Who can say? I should like greatly to know who it is that marries me. I am a romantic, yes, but for me marriage is difficult and dangerous. As an 'usband I might fail abominably." He addressed them, expounding another of the theories with which his head was stored, "It is my belief," he declared, "that a man with any brains—any soul—who 'as lived as we 'ave lived—it is difficult for that man to fall in love. I mean 'love', my friends, not that other thing we experience whenever there is something out of petticoats about. Me!—I can no longer associate love and sex. The

one kills the other. That is why I would not make the good 'usband. Follow me! The bought women, the 'ired women, the women easy come by, the women who 'ave been unpaid but 'ave robbed me—all these I know and can deal with. It is the business we both understand. I am at 'ome with them. But they 'ave taken sex out of love—the love of my dreams. Sex 'as become a tarnished thing—alas! Sex must not be mixed up with love for me—it cannot be. Mix sex with my love, and be'old! my wife wears the faces of all the bought women, is no better than them, of no more account. True, but regrettable, my friends, for I 'ave the soul romantic!"

He went on to expound his proposition and its consequences with a wealth of frank detail. They heard him, amused and interested. Some of M. Cuvelier's more subtle points escaped them, but talk on that subject always found an audience. He was still rattling on, volatile and voluble, when the *Geervliet*, with another prolonged hoot, rounded the point and entered the bay. The difficulties of true love for M. Cuvelier were forgotten.

In that black emptiness she was a ship of light, a leviathan. The rows of portholes and the luminous bands of her decks had a carnival appearance, but distance, the setting and her steady progress gave dignity to this gaiety so that she became a beautiful and stately thing floating effortlessly in from the sea. The natives raised a hubbub. Canoes appeared about the jetty, busy, like water-beetles. The party stepped down into them, and paddles dipped breaking the surface into phosphorescent flakes like white quartz. The vessel was stationary now. Her anchor went

with a roar and a rattle echoed by the unseen hills. The paddlers swung rhythmically and the hollowed logs stole on. Shoals of fish, gleaming mistily, flashed away. Sea-snakes wriggled down into the depths in twisting threads of light. Huge and ghostly shapes passed far below cruising slowly among drowned stars.

On closer approach the *Geervliet* lost some of her glamour. Her breath was pungent and heavy, speaking of cattle, deck passengers, rotten fruit and steam. But she grew exciting and noisy, a city established suddenly in the wilderness. She towered above the canoes. Great lamps flared around her opened hatches in preparation for unloading. A launch was lowered with a whining of blocks and a resounding splash. Orders were shouted.

"It is always the thrill," said M. Cuvelier. "I get it always." In the light which bathed them now he looked young and full of animation.

The canoes clustered about the companion-ladder, and the visitors made the long ascent. On reaching the deck they stood in a close group, somewhat dazed by the bustle and the sense of many people. But they were familiar callers, and were cordially greeted by the plump Dutch officers. It seemed that Mynheer van Rossen had come back this trip. He marched heavily towards them, a square-bodied, square-headed box of a man, blonde of hair, slow of speech, comfortable.

"Ach, Monsieur Cuvelier," he said. "You are still here, yes?"

"As ever!" sighed M. Cuvelier with a helpless shrug, and introduced Mat Bradley. Without delay

a general move was made towards the smoke-room where bottles nestled in beds of ice. The *Geervliet's* passengers might lean on the rail and study romantic Netherlandia in its shroud of night; the people of the outpost had other interests.

When they were settled around a marble-topped table beneath an electric fan—which nobody else aboard could appreciate so well—and with their hands clasped fondly about dewy glasses, Mynheer van Rossen beamed at them.

"Drink then to my good fortune," he rumbled. "My trip is the success, yes. Ach, I leave this place; yes, I leave it. I shall not manage Gryndheim's plantation when I retire. No! I go back to the fatherland. I shall have the little home in Veendeem, my native place. Ach!" He nodded repeatedly, his fat chin pressing into his neck. They were already drinking to his good-fortune.

Gryndheim, a fabulous character in Netherlandia, was the reputed owner of the coconut plantation which lay on the outer slopes between the bay and the sea. That, at some time, such a person had been in Netherlandia was not doubted, but it was by no means so generally accepted that he was the owner of those acres of trees, which, providentially, were just coming into bearing as Mynheer van Rossen reached the age of retiring from the Dutch-Indian service. An officer who ran a plantation might not have been popular with the authorities, but there was nothing to prevent such a one giving an eye to the property of an absent friend. Gryndheim had become a byword. Promises dated by or contingent on Gryndheim's return were readily offered but never accepted.

The glasses had been emptied and were being filled again. "And so," said M. Cuvelier, "you desert your friend, the excellent Gryndheim?"

Van Rossen shook with inward merriment.

"No, no! No, no! I think I have the buyer for the property of Gryndheim. Gryndheim has requested that I sell if I can. I must obey his wishes; yes, it is right. But I have nothing then to keep me in Netherlandia. No, I shall go home!" He worked his lips like a placid animal chewing a cud. "His name is Louis Kingsclere, yes. He with his wife comes to look at the plantation of Gryndheim. If it is good to them they will buy."

This news of possible additions to their colony was more exciting than any of the affairs of nations. But the flood of inquiries and exclamations was checked by van Rossen raising a warning finger and indicating a man who had just entered. The prospective purchaser of the Gryndheim estate walked to the bar window with a bundle of chits and leaned there paying his reckoning. They made good use of the opportunity for inspection.

M. Cuvelier was first to express an opinion.

"'E seems of the quiet, thoughtful kind."

They agreed in undertones. "Looks almost too respectable for Netherlandia," said Boyce.

"He may look it, but he's not, or he wouldn't be here," Tom Thompson declared.

And Evan Jones, sitting at the next table but with his chair swung towards them so that he was in the party and yet outside, quoted, in his abstracted way: "'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.'"

They were not listening to Evan Jones.

Van Rossen, catching the newcomer's eye, beckoned to him. He crossed to their table and met them with friendliness but reserve.

"You are welcome to Netherlandia, Mis-tair Kingsclere," said the Frenchman, rising and offering his chair. "You must consent to 'ave your first drink with me." He paused, and his squirrel eyes brightened. "But there is madame—per'aps it is that she would join us. This is an occasion, you will understand. We are but the very few 'ere."

"Yes, I'll see if she feels like it," Kingsclere agreed, and left them.

"A quiet kind," reiterated M. Cuvelier. "Do you think that 'e laughs within at us, and if so why does 'e laugh?"

They could not answer his question, but admitted that they had been puzzled by a similar impression.

"This wife—what kind is she then, mynheer?" M. Cuvelier took his moustache and tugged at it, his thumbs upright across his lips, his index fingers cupped above. He looked more than ever like some dark, glossy member of the squirrel family.

"You shall see, yes. You shall see."

Van Rossen's reticence—whether arising from mere sluggishness or from a sense of the dramatic—added to the effect of Leila's entry. They had a few moments in which to wonder what to expect, and then, while they were still unprepared, she had come in quietly and was with them. They were startled, amazed. This was not the planter's wife of their experience. They stood up nervously, and stared at her in flattering and naïve surprise. Only Mr. Carrington and Evan Jones remained unmoved.

Leila was in white—a straight, simple washing frock, sleeveless, collarless and bare of ornament or colour. The deep darkness of her eyes, the smooth darkness of her hair and the beauty of her skin were emphasised. She achieved a note of bewildering simplicity. M. Cuvelier's nimble wits were the first to recover. A fancy came to him that she had nothing on save that dress—that if one opened it, like the covers of a book, like a cylinder, she would be revealed naked within, gleaming and white and cool. The thought stirred his pulses.

The people of Netherlandia found themselves subjected to a grave inspection while van Rossen, grunting, presented them. Their uneasiness was lulled. She was like a soothing draught. They drank her up with their eyes, forgetting the quiet fellow, Louis Kingsclere, who stood beside her.

"Do sit down," she said in her steady voice. "I am glad to meet you all." She took the chair to which M. Cuvelier bowed her. "And so you are the people of this dark, new world!"

She considered the sleek and handsome M. Cuvelier, the masterful Mat Bradley, the venerable and sinful Thompson, the taciturn Mr. Carrington, the skeleton-jawed Boyce and the lost Evan Jones. They recognised they were being thus weighed and catalogued, but the process was so dispassionate that it did not trouble them. They submitted to it, and took their fill of gazing at her.

She turned to her husband.

"I've been looking at the shore, Louis," she said to him. "There's nothing there—nothing at all. I think we shall like this place." A glance about in-

cluded the company. "Yes," she said, "I think we shall like this place."

"Indeed, madame, it is our 'ope that you so do," said M. Cuvelier. "May it be permitted me to say that if you take the plantation of Gryndheim, Netherlandia will be the much more pleasant place in which to live."

As usual he appointed himself spokesman. They envied him his glibness and they murmured endorsement.

Mat Bradley remarked in his deep tones: "I'll say so!"

She gave them her easy, faintly amused smile.

"Yes?" she said. "At any rate more interesting."

M. Cuvelier, with the vivacity of one eager to celebrate a stroke of fortune, called for wine. He took his clipped moustache in his fingers again, and tugged at it.

CHAPTER XI

Mynheer van Rossen had gone to bed at last. His snores worked up a scale of harshness and volume to a climax, broke, paused, began again. The process was so regular that, like the croaking of the frogs and the shrillings of the insects with which it blended, it did not break the effect of complete silence which possessed the height where, problematically, Gryndheim had elected to build his homestead.

The house was open to the weather on all four sides, for the outer walls of the square of wide veranda were made of plaited fibre in the form of shutters opening upwards and outwards and only lowered when the rains came. Within, the divisions between the rooms were flimsy and movable. Supported on rough-hewn tree trunks the thatched roof rose to a peak and in its mysterious gloom unseen creatures rustled occasionally. Breaths of breeze coming in from the sea wandered, sighing.

"It is like floating in the sky," said Leila.

When van Rossen left them they had deserted the formal front of the house for the empty, bare, dark back veranda. They sat side by side on the steps leading down from it to the ground, and this suited their mood much better. It suggested, in some peculiar fashion, youth, friendliness and a spirit of play. They were comfortable there; it was great fun.

"Yes," Kingsclere agreed on the same hushed note. "Yes, this is what I had hoped to find."

The land fell sharply away before them, so that

they looked out over a great bowl of night on the furthest edge of which the ranges rose, dim and blacker than the blackness. They had an Olympian sense of remoteness. The stars seemed closer. Far below—appearing much further than it really was—a single patch of light marked Li-Goon's store. Out on the hidden bay the dwarfed *Geervliet* was set in a splash of gold. Steam rose in plumes, tiny derricks lowered toy boxes into the narrow maws of lighters, and a haze drifted from her funnel. The activity aboard her seemed trivial to those lofty observers. They had difficulty in realising that so recently she had involved them in noise and affairs.

Kingsclere was full of peace, like one at the end of a long journey. He put his arm about his wife, and drew her to him. She rested her head on his breast in drowsy content, and closed her eyes. They remained so in a repose typical of their relationship. No confidences passed between them and neither attempted to express the complete satisfaction they enjoyed. Through four months of marriage each had respected the privacy of the other's soul, as something inviolable and sacred. The attitude adopted in their talks at Pierre's had been zealously preserved, and with complete success. They had lived and loved and been happy together even as they sat at that moment—close, linked, heart beating with heart, but their innermost beings as utterly hidden each from each as the darkest glade in the darkest valley of the dark mountains before them.

"So we shall stay?" said Kingsclere presently, but although the words fell into the form of a question they merely stated a fact known to both.

"Yes," said Leila, and added, as she had upon the *Geervliet*: "I think I shall like it here." She nestled to him. "I know I shall," she said.

For no apparent reason Kingsclere experienced one of those tremors of trepidation which came to him at times. In the midst of his happiness he was reminded that he had created a false life to match the false man he had made, and that seemed an improper, hazardous enterprise for a mere mortal to attempt, over-ambitious and doomed to failure. He looked into the empty bowl of night. The very completeness of his success shook his faith in it. He suffered from the human distrust of good fortune. Could Netherlandia really be as perfect as it appeared, so truly his spiritual home? He prayed it might be. It was so isolated and quiet; it had no past or present, nor any time at all; it was a backwater of the world in which strange fish could swim. He remembered the group in the smoke-room. They were strange fish—they had escaped from life into Netherlandia. It was a pool of refuge. But even here could one really escape from life and the facts of life? He longed to believe so—it seemed almost possible within that sanctuary of sea and wilderness—but doubt remained and the haunting knowledge of guilt. The place and hour were touched with magic, but, he mused, the magic was black.

Leila stirred in his arms. Although he could not see her face he knew she was looking up at him with calm eyes.

"It's fine, Lulu, playing at being a married couple up here, isn't it?" she whispered.

His response was immediate. The shadows were

driven away by the keen realisation of joy. She played upon him like a skilled musician and he saw what she did and loved her for it. He had given up his life to the man he had made; he had given up the man he had made as completely to her. This was no sacrifice, but a mere fulfilment. For had he not made her, also?

"Oh, heart!" he breathed. "My dear heart!" His lips pressed on her hair.

"Then you may put me to bed, for I am lazy, love." She rubbed her face gently against him, pleading like a child. Leila played the child supremely well. She did not ape a child as an adult imagines a child to be, but caught the dignity, simplicity and directness of reality. The trick always bewitched Kingsclere. It was so unlike her and yet it came so naturally. Laughing fondly he raised her to her feet, and, hands beneath her elbows, held her to him and kissed her.

"You and I all alone up here!" he rejoiced.

Her lips trembled teasingly against his.

"All alone? Why, you're dreaming, Lulu! Just listen to Mynheer van Rossen. I'm afraid the noise he's making is going to keep me awake. Shall you mind very much, Lulu?"

Her voice sighed away on the question, leaving the breeze to whisper, the frogs and insects to maintain their chorus, and Mynheer van Rossen to snore.

And down below—down on the earth—the other inhabitants of Netherlandia were standing in a group in Wilhelminastraat outside Li-Goon's and looking up at the house on the hill though they

could not see it because it was lost in night. They had been cast out of the Eden of the *Geervliet's* bar, and, rather unsteady on their feet, were making their way home accompanied by the bodyguard of fireflies. The newcomers had been discussed at length, but the evening had reached a stage when every repetition acquired novelty and the stalest remark had to be debated.

"'E is so dull, so 'umdrum—I know not 'ow such a man 'opes to 'old such a girl—I know not 'ow 'e ever won 'er," M. Cuvelier announced as if for the first time. "And what a girl—ah!" He kissed his fingers up at Gryndheim's place, swaying gracefully the while as if on the deck of a ship. Romantic tears glistened in his eyes.

Thompson winked mightily behind his glasses which winked in the light of the lanterns.

"Easy seen our little Cuvelier fancies his chances," he said. "As for me I'm no longer as young as I once was."

"Chances?" scoffed Boyce. "She puts the fear of God into me."

"That's two out of the way, Cuvelier. And what about you, Mat?"

Bradley, his shirt open, his hair dishevelled and his eyes glazed, looked as if he had taken a complete holiday from his task in the ring. The relief had led to a collapse. He had let himself go. His head waggled.

"Not on your sweet life—not Mat! Hell, no! When I want a woman I can get one without risking my neck." He made a sideways, slicing movement with his hand, scornfully cutting himself off from

the suggestion. "Yes, sir—I know those quiet chaps. They go mad as snakes if you start fooling after their women. Put a bullet in you quick as look at you. They cut their fool throats, then, but what good's that to you? Oh, no, sir—not for mine!"

"There you are!—a clear run!"

Tom Thompson slapped M. Cuvelier heartily on the back.

"You are the offence when you are drunk!" said M. Cuvelier solemnly.

They passed down Wilhelminastraat laughing and mocking.

" 'Thine eyes shall behold strange women and thine heart shall utter perverse things,' " Evan Jones murmured.

He tramped behind them, disregarded, unheeded, a shadow in their lives. And yet eyes had watched that procession seeing all the rest as shadows and Evan Jones as the noblest and greatest of men. The eyes—fierce, intent, glowing—were those of Analoolie, who, disturbed from a strange vigil by the noise, peered out of a ruined hut and pressed his fevered forehead into the dust at the sight of the little Welshman. In the blackness of the place a tiny fire burned, no more than the ends of two pieces of wood which meeting glowed, and broke into tiny bursts of sparks at long intervals, giving off an acrid smell. Analoolie, kneeling over those ruby spots, watched and prayed. The stars looked down on him through rifts in the roof. He alone was awake in all that world.

His prayers were wild and barbarous. They were heathen incantations expressed in terms which were

sometimes Christian and sometimes darkly savage. In the red glimmer his face showed, now exultant, now contorted. He grovelled on the earthen floor in a paroxysm of fanatical intoxication; he lay still and numb and trancelike with froth about his lips. Once he stood upright holding the two sticks crossed and on high so that the points of light were stars among the stars. Then with the fiery tip of one he traced upon his bare chest the sign of the cross, enduring the pain with an ecstatic smile. The hours went by but his weird ceremonies continued. And he had his reward. Visions came to him; into his willing ears voices spoke the great message and revealed the task which awaited him. Before the dawn he had seen a light brighter than the sun's, and thereafter he lay, limp and utterly spent, but satisfied.

Day came in and Netherlandia awoke. Brown figures appeared about the short crescent of the settlement's only thoroughfare between the black beach and the straggling row of houses and huts. Immediately behind the jungle began, flooding over the foothills to the ranges in a tide of dark, glossy green. A breeze set the wet leaves quivering so that they glinted in the level beams. Smoke ascended from cookhouse chimneys. Canoes stole from the native village of Hakadada which was built out over the ruffled water on spindly piles. The island to which it was attached seemed to float on the surface of the bay. The black-hulled brig rode at anchor. Beyond the entrance the ocean stretched to the sky's rim.

Analoolie, the Lost Tribesman, walked Wilhelminastraat with dignity. He stared straight before him, and though his thin, sharp face was

haggard, it wore an expression of pride and joy. Analoolie knew that he was not as his fellows, but apart and favoured. He had been called to a glorious mission, had accepted it, and now, wasting no time, was about its performance. He was inspired and certain. He breathed the morning air haughtily, knowing that only one greater man shared it with him and he was to be that man's disciple.

The coastal people watched the stranger from the mountains pass but they were afraid of him and avoided his eyes. When his back was turned they thrust out their tongues and ground bare heels in the dust.

In the shade of a cluster of palms beside Tom Thompson's house Pedro, the boxer, was skipping. He wore a sweater and shorts. His quick hands twirled the rope at such a pace that it encased him in a shimmering cocoon. So nimble were his feet in their cloth boots and gay rolled socks that there was no suggestion of them touching the ground. He was more agile and light than a ballet dancer. His muscles rippled. Naked children with pieces of vine sought to emulate him, and fell and giggled. Pedro was surrounded by an admiring, blank-faced circle, but he looked contemptuously over their heads, for they were ignorant savages.

Analoolie only deigned a single glance equally scornful. His mind dwelt far above such follies. He strode on until he reached the further end of Wilhelminastraat where Evan Jones dwelt a little apart, his home, as it were, an appendage to the main settlement. It was a ramshackle place, more hut than house, built of palm leaves, and in poor repair. But

it served Evan Jones, whose tastes were simple.

The trader was eating his breakfast in the main room which was open to the veranda and looked out on the bay. He still wore pyjamas, and appeared a lonely and forlorn little figure sitting in that bare place before a poorly-set table. His only companion was the great black cockatoo which walked on a wooden perch beside him, raising and lowering its flame coloured comb and watching Evan Jones with red-rimmed eyes. Analoolie, a mere shadow beside a veranda-post, looked in and saw that, indeed, all things were as had been reported to him. His elation increased.

Taking the stone of a mango from his plate Evan Jones held it before the bird which immediately began to dance from side to side and chuckle. But the trader shook his head in disapproval and laid the stone down. The bird stood still, sulking and angry. Evan Jones looked away firmly.

As if under protest the bird lifted up its head and spoke. "Hell and destruction are never full," it croaked with bad grace in the harsh, raucous tones of a senile old man. Its great bill opened showing the scaly strip of tongue. Evan Jones smiled, and put the stone into the outstretched claw. Only he knew how many hours of patience had been required to teach the cockatoo Emmanuel some half-dozen phrases of the Word.

Analoolie stiffened, and his eyes fired. In the jungle he had heard bird mimicry, but this was a miracle. There could be no doubt that the bird talked with the One-Big-Fellow-God just as the missionaries did. The bird, then was as holy as a

missionary. What of the bird's master. . . ? Analoolie's wits had wandered through forests of unassimilated teachings and inherited superstition, through mists of blackness, through unravelable twistings, through extraordinary fires and mazes of grotesque reasonings, but they had come at last to definite and unquestionable conclusions which brought him to the house of Evan Jones in the first light of day.

Every anticipation was confirmed. This was the master whom he had been sent to seek and whom he had recognised from the gossip of the other brown men. His night of prayer had been wondrously answered. A shudder ran through him. He straightened up and his sharp, predatory face shone with resolution. He made the sign of the cross on his scarred breast. Then quickly, eagerly, he stepped into the house and, head bowed, crouched on his knees at Evan Jones's feet. The cockatoo danced, ripping strings of fibre from the stone. Evan Jones looked down at Analoolie in his vague, gentle way. He was not surprised, for he had dwelt long enough with natives to know that no white man need ever hope to understand them. But he liked them, and being a humble soul felt at ease in their company. They took no liberties with him because there were no liberties they could take. Evan Jones had no dignity to worry about.

"Yes, Analoolie?"

Analoolie crouched lower.

"Master," he said in reverence, "Analoolie stop along you, Analoolie stop along you plenty too much time? Stop along all time? Analoolie name John."

The engaging of another houseboy was a matter of no great consequence, and Evan Jones knew that Analoolie had returned from the mission-station a God-fearing and fervent Christian.

"I am glad you have come to me, Analoolie that is called John," he said abstractedly. "Yes, you shall stop along, look you. It is fitting you should stop along me in this heathen land." He paused and then added thinking aloud: " 'The soul of the diligent shall be made fat.' "

The cockatoo having disposed of the stone and hoping for another screamed and intoned hoarsely: "Dinner of herbs love is! Dinner of herbs love is!"

"Master all the same one piece God!" said Analoolie, still kneeling.

But Evan Jones had retired into his thoughts again. He gazed dreamily out over the bay into the infinity of the sky.

Analoolie waited. The silence lengthened. The grey lids slipped across the cockatoo's eyes. The hush was sacred and complete. The Lost Tribesman looked up fearfully at his master. Evan Jones was still lost in meditations. Analoolie perceived dimly that his thoughts went out beyond the world. The rapt expression suggested communion with that great dweller in the skies. His awe increased. He dared not intrude, but drew back, still bent double, and went through the house to begin his duties in the name of John.

By reason of these things, later in the day when the blind and unenlightened Tom Thompson met Analoolie in Wilhelminastraat and suggested that

he should take a position with him to help with the extra work entailed by the presence of the boxer and his manager, he was answered with an emphatic and haughty shake of the head.

"No can," said Analoolie, insulted and indignant. "No can!" He struck his breast a resounding blow. "This fellow stop along master one fellow god. One fellow master talk plenty birds."

Tom Thompson stared at him.

"What's crawling on you now?" he demanded, at a loss.

"One fellow god!" said Analoolie. His arm swept up, and he pointed to the house that the Philistine might understand.

"Oh, Evan Jones——!" said Thompson. His interest evaporated immediately as Analoolie was not available. "You'll make a fine pair of Bible thumpers, you two!" he said aloud as he walked on, though he was not conscious of speaking.

Analoolie drew his thin body up to its full height and spat.

CHAPTER XII

When Gryndheim—assuming Gryndheim had anything to do with it—decided to build the house on the hilltop he had shown slight consideration for visitors, mused M. Cuvelier ruefully as he paused and mopped his brow. If his ambition had been to become a hermit he had gone the right way about it—otherwise, what a folly!

In the month the Kingscleres had dwelt there they would not have been more isolated had the plantation been situated fifty miles down the coast and M. Cuvelier their only neighbour. He alone had dared the climb more than once. The others had found the effort too much and the reward unsatisfactory. If the Kingscleres wanted company they could come down to Li-Goon's, and do the climb back themselves. Anyway, the others said, they'd a feeling that the Kingscleres could get on very well without callers. They kept themselves to themselves and though polite enough in a formal way told you nothing and didn't make you feel at home. There was a funny atmosphere, the others said, about that house up there. It had made them uncomfortable. M. Cuvelier had shrugged his shoulders to all this, and had paid his visits as regularly as he decently could. It suited him very well to be the only outsider to ascend to the height where beauty dwelt. As for the atmosphere he did not allow that to trouble him. Was it not fascinating, exciting, puzzling? Was not the mysterious quiet and reserve of the place a perfect

frame for the girl Leila who was white and cool and still in a land of jabbering, odiferous brown women?

Half-way up the steep path M. Cuvelier sat on a boulder to regain his breath. He was not in the best of training and though the sun was going towards the western hills the air was still hot and heavy.

"She is worth it! She is worth it!" he told himself. He found æsthetic pleasure in the labour of the climb. To have been able to walk straight off Wilhelminastraat into that house would not have been nearly so fitting.

Before him an opening in the leaves framed still bay and cloudless sky. Looking out into the blue, M. Cuvelier wondered, as he always did when he paused there, what fortune awaited him. The climax was drawing near now. It might come any day. For his pursuit was making far better progress than the earthlings guessed. At each call he spoke more boldly with his eyes, was more subtle in flattery, more attentive, and, when they were momentarily alone together, expressed his admiration with greater frankness. He had touched her hands and even held them; he had put meaning into casual physical contacts. Reviewing his achievements he found they made a promising total, particularly in view of the paucity of his opportunities. The stupid husband was continually on the scene. Still, bricks had been made even with the little straw at his disposal. At any time he might get the only opportunity needed to risk the adventure of a real advance—the opportunity of a little privacy. He was confident of himself, his arts and his proficiency. When that chance came he would snatch it and use it to the full. Had

Paul Cuvelier ever been slow in conquest? But no! . . . That had been the secret of his successes. The fact that this girl Leila foiled all his observation and neither encouraged nor rebuked whetted his appetite. What would she do? Would she respond? And if she did what amazing, dangerous and delicious experiences awaited him! Perhaps this very evening? . . .

Refreshed, he resumed the ascent.

But he was hot again by the time he reached the summit and stood on the front steps to call: "Anybody at 'ome?"

Kingsclere stood before him, dull and grim as ever, and a gun was in the crook of his arm. Sharp, like the report of a shot, the memory of Mat Bradley's warnings about these quiet fellows flashed back. M. Cuvelier could not repress the start of apprehension. But, hastily, reminding himself that the only danger lay in his own knowledge of intent, he regained control, and turned the movement into a gesture of fatigue. To all the world outside his own mind he was no more than an afternoon caller. What foolishness was this?

"Hullo, Cuvelier," Kingsclere was saying. "Come in."

He had noticed nothing, and betrayed neither pleasure nor annoyance, accepting the visitor as a matter-of-course. M. Cuvelier smiled gaily at Kingsclere and at the absurdity of his momentary alarm.

"An 'ot climb, Kingsclere. Very 'ot. But you go out shooting?"

"Yes, only for half-an-hour. I'm after some

pigeons. Mrs. Kingsclere's just dressing. She'll be out any minute. Come in and wait."

"I should be charmed. Per'aps I might first 'ave the wash. This 'ouse of yours, it is beautifully situated—if you live 'ere!"

"Certainly—come along with me." He led the way through to the bathroom, calling for a boy, and they talked casually of the weather and the little affairs of life in Netherlandia. M. Cuvelier took off his white coat which buttoned straight up the collar, and waited in his sleeveless vest while the basin was filled. He saw his host considering him, and was pleased to cut a good figure. M. Cuvelier contrived to remain lissome, erect and muscular, for exercise was not essential to him. He was not one of those Anglo-Saxons who had always to be doing something with a ball if they wished to keep their figures. Hot and all, he was still full of vitality. The contrast between them was all in his favour. The other looked, he knew, heavy and stolid alongside him, almost a yokel. And he was going shooting? Pleasant considerations bubbled in M. Cuvelier's mind as he splashed and puffed in the basin. The water, drawn from the deep tank which van Rossen had sunk for his friend Gryndheim, was icy cool. M. Cuvelier appreciated it.

But when he turned for the towel with one of his sudden movements he discovered his host studying him in a manner inimical and brooding. A shiver ran up his spine. He turned away hastily to conceal his fears. That silent figure behind him with the gun! . . . Mat Bradley's warning recurred. Was anything suspected? Why did not that man talk as

others did and give clues to his thoughts? With a murmur which requested permission, M. Cuvelier, undaunted, took up a comb and arranged his hair in preparation for the conquest of that grim man's wife. He darted a glance at Kingsclere in the mirror, and was reassured. His nerves had played him false, or the look had been an illusion due to a trick of the light. Kingsclere's expression was that of one detained but patient.

"Ah, much better! Much better!" M. Cuvelier exclaimed, voicing both refreshment and relief.

His host helped him on with his coat, and they returned to the veranda. M. Cuvelier felt almost sorry now for the dull creature who, sooner or later, was to be made a cuckold.

"If you'll excuse me I'll get away. The light will be short as it is."

"But certainly," M. Cuvelier agreed graciously. "I shall be most comfortable 'ere." And he added to himself: "Ah, but it is droll!"

"The boy'll get you anything you want to drink. Just shout for him."

M. Cuvelier expressed gratitude, and Kingsclere followed by a bearer with the gun went down the steps and vanished among the boles of the palms.

Settling himself easily in a cane chair M. Cuvelier tugged at his moustache and smiled. Everybody to his own sport—everybody to his own hunting! Personally he had no desire to destroy wood-pigeons.

It was pleasant on the veranda. The sun had passed to the back of the house, and the air was beginning to cool. The shadows lay long on the ground. Stirring slightly, the tops of the palms ran

down like a green torrent to the beach, and beyond was the ocean seeming finally to rise in a curve to meet the downward curve of azure sky. Flowering vines crept over the railing and up to the roof. Their blooms were violet and scarlet. M. Cuvelier—his senses made receptive and keen by excitement—inhaled their breath. His nostrils were as conscious of the colours as his eyes were. The flowers smelt scarlet and violet. He played with the idea, finding sensuous enjoyment in it, and all the time he thought of Leila and what turn the experiment would take.

Kingsclere's shooting had begun. The reports came loudly through the evening quiet, but they were sufficiently far away. M. Cuvelier smiled again. Surely of husbands the most amiable to thus signal his whereabouts at regular intervals!

Leila, rested and cool, came out of the house, and he sprang up. Without being aware of it he had already gone far with the adventure in his own imaginings, so far, indeed, that for all his experience he lost his head at the sight of her. The barriers which remained to be surmounted became negligible. Bliss seemed already won. The blood hurried through him. He lost suavity and recovered youth. She wore a dress similar to the one in which he had first seen her—it was a kind of uniform with her, and the sameness was wise, for it meant that there were no distractions: she was always Leila, hidden in a single sheath of whiteness.

"Why, M. Cuvelier——!" She extended her hand.

He took it and held it, looking deeply into the un-

plumbable depths of her eyes. He could read nothing there. He put her hand to his lips. She did not withdraw it, but let it repose in his hot fingers and against his hot mouth. A faint, sweet aroma stole into his brain from her skin. The earlier thread of his thoughts was resumed for a second: she smelt white, like marble. He prolonged the kiss, as if he had found a draught so sweet that he could never drink enough, and all the time his dark eyes watched her in naked supplication.

Leila did not seem to feel his passion. She remained contemplative, balanced, making no pretence at not understanding but giving him no answer. She was not cold. She suggested to him a fire isolated in a crystal shrine which burned apart from his burnings but which, if he could only reach it, would blaze into a great flame. The suggestion was maddening to M. Cuvelier, the artist. He tried to force some confession from her, but her unwavering gaze told him nothing at all. Her lips smiled with him and at him, a very little.

M. Cuvelier released her hand, and stood still, like one enchanted. He felt helpless. He worshipped, but was afraid. There was something about her which made her unlike any other woman.

Leila moved to the rail and leaned against it, with the flowers, the palms and the sky behind her. Then she spoke.

"At the very first opportunity, M. Cuvelier—I congratulate you." The words might have been mockery or veiled invitation. He could not tell. He held out his hands to her in appeal. She was in no hurry to go on, but paused in a leisurely way. Out

in the evening Louis Kingsclere fired at a pigeon. She waited, watching M. Cuvelier's face while the report trembled and died away. The sound warned him of time slipping past. The hush was restored. Through it, like a quivering breath, came the first puff of the night breeze. "I have been wondering when and how you would take the next step. You did it quite well. But the French do, of course." She looked at the back of her hand. "Quite well," she admitted again. "You should be able to give a real kiss admirably, M. Cuvelier." She broke off again, considering his eyes and his full lips beneath the block of moustache as if weighing them with sober care.

M. Cuvelier had reached the limit of endurance. But he did not move. He could not grapple with her. She was remote, beyond him.

"You torment me!" he burst out.

"I——? Oh, no—you torment yourself, monsieur."

"It is you—you! You have known since the first moment that I set my eyes upon you 'ow it was with me. I 'ave made no secret of it—I 'ave stripped my soul before you at every chance so that it should be shown to you the manner of my feelings. Ah! you are not the blind—you are not the fool—you 'ave known!" Real pain was in his cry. The glib, assured Frenchman had gone. In his place a lonely man out of a wasted life clamoured for the beauty which had revivified his soul. He took a step forward, his long fingers trembling, his lips parted. "You 'ave known!" he insisted.

"Yes, I have known."

She crossed her arms on her breasts and bent her head a little. Her face, proud neck and firm, strong body became motionless again. She was silhouetted against the sky which had begun to flush—a poet's peasant Madonna in a pane of opal glass.

M. Cuvelier's eyes feasted upon her, reckless of the pain her beauty caused him. All his hopes, all his expectations, all his plans had been dissipated. The moment possessed and absorbed him.

"Why did you come 'ere—I was 'appy till you came!" He spoke through his teeth, melodramatically, but escaped being absurd because he was a Latin. "Now what 'appiness for me? None! None! I desire you every hour of every day and night. For me now there is no rest, no peace. I am eaten up; I am devoured. It is you who eats me up—you dwelling up 'ere in 'eaven like a blessed saint. I am thirsty in the desert—you are water. I am 'ungry in the wilderness—you are food. I am weary in the world—you are rest. Leila, you know all this. You 'ave known it. You 'ave read it every minute I am with you. Leila! Leila! Leila!"

As he spoke her name two more shots sounded. They seemed nearer—they challenged and threatened. M. Cuvelier sprang forward and seized her in his arms. She made no struggle, for her strength did not lie there. But M. Cuvelier felt it. He did not kiss her. The sweetness of her body soothed and stilled his passion while intensifying it. He simply looked down into her eyes with adoration.

Her hands uncrossed and rested deliberately but without pressure against his chest.

"Let me go now," she said. "You are to let me

go. I want to talk to you. Sit down in your chair again."

The order was given without a tremor. Her hands did not thrust him away. There was no need. M. Cuvelier, marvelling that he did so, freed her and went obediently to the chair where he sat numbly, and elbows on knees and chin on clenched hands, looked up at her. This defeat, he told himself, made him happy because it was only temporary and she remained a prize to be won. But, even as he urged the view, he knew it was not the solution.

Leila provided that.

She had remained where he had left her. She could see his face clearly, because the light, warming with the last of the day, fell full upon it.

"I wonder," she said slowly in French, "if you ever think in these days of Marie and the White Mountain."

M. Cuvelier's face set and the blood drained out of it. His body was rigid. He did not even seem to breathe. Fear without understanding looked out of his eyes at her. Time passed.

"Oh, my God," gasped M. Cuvelier at last, reverting naturally to his native tongue, "a witch——!"

He meant it. The twentieth century had fallen from him like a forgotten cloak. In that sunset hour on that high place he had wooed a witch.

"No," she said, "a ghost."

Her lips were parted slightly. She drew in his fear, his amazement, his pain, with a deliberation which savoured every shade and value.

His mind was slow to understand the words and slower to believe them. Through the mists in his

eyes he saw her in outline. As he watched she seemed to dwindle, to shrink. She remained herself and yet with that slow process of shrinking changed in a thousand details. The child Marie stood before him in her short white frock with her hair blowing loosely and the innocence of dawn in her face. Marie! The name rang through him, and escaped between his lips. He rose, went to her and knelt at her feet, his head bowed, his fingers clutching the end of her dress.

"Marie!"

She inclined her head in assent and the smile which had been hiding about her mouth came out and played quietly.

He remained very still in the presence of this dear ghost while he tried to comprehend, and looking up at last saw that she had grown again and had become Leila. He was abashed, overwhelmed. Rising unsteadily he passed his hand across his eyes and brows and retreated to the chair again where he crouched.

"And you——! And you——!" he said, over and over again in a whisper.

"Yes: Marie. Marie grown up and called Leila now. Queer, isn't it?" She still spoke in French. A corner of his mind remembered that he had never even discovered the Leila he pursued could speak his tongue. "You wouldn't kiss me that day we climbed the White Mountain, though I tried, ah! so hard and by every means I dared to make you. But you wouldn't kiss me."

She did not complain, but stated a peculiar fact.

M. Cuvelier heard himself answering: "How should I kiss you? You were the little goddess—

the white child. It would not have been right for me—it would have spoiled every thing. I was six years older."

There was so much he had to say and yet here they were debating the ethics of that childish outing. He tried to recover his reason.

"And I am old now so it does not matter if you kiss me? I am no longer the little goddess and the white child." But she was. He had seen her so. "I am just Louis Kingsclere's wife." He winced at that. "How unkind the years, Paul!"

He made a brief, powerless gesture, and they were silent, until he asked: "How long have you known?"

"Since the first moment on the *Geervliet*."

"And you never spoke?"

"Why should I? Why waste such news? You cannot complain. I, too, have taken advantage of the first favourable opportunity. But yes—I knew before the *Geervliet*. I knew in Saigon, away up in Indo-Chine. You remember Georges, the smart young man of the world who used to come up to Vence from Nice to see his uncle?—You remember him?"

He nodded, dazed. The name conjured up dead days.

"He is middle-aged with a big black beard now, that Georges. It is very amusing. We used to talk of the old times. I wondered once what had happened to Paul Cuvelier. Georges had heard from your brother—Jean; he who is in the navy. His gunboat had been at Saigon. Georges had learned from Jean that you were down here—outcaste in New Guinea in some place of the heathens called Netherlandia. Who then would have said that I should ever see it

—or meet you again? But that is life! When we talked with Mynheer van Rossen the name came back. Behold, we are here!"

His head spun with the effort of trying to assimilate all this—this talk of Jean and Georges, this sudden miraculous linking of the past with Netherlandia where time was not. Figures which had lived only in memory moved now in the present. Scenes of yesterday and to-day were inextricably mixed with the bewildering inconsequence of a dream. His wits wandered lost in a strange limbo in which the ordinary divisions of life were wiped away. Presently he seized upon a distinct idea and asked: "It was your wish then to see me?"

"I do not know. We are here."

Night had settled down. The breeze had grown, and the palms rustled and chafed. Shadows had taken possession of the veranda and the colours had ebbed from the sky, leaving it silver and clear. Leila had become an intangible, illusive presence. There had been no shots for a long time.

"Awake, my friend," she said. "Leila's husband will be here at any moment. You might not wish to meet him. You would betray to him that you have seen a ghost. Louis Kingsclere returns to Marie who is Leila, his wife."

She chose the words of the warning carefully, and they took immediate effect. M. Cuvelier was aroused. The thought of having to endure further developments while he was still bemused aroused panic in him. His only desire was to escape back to the sanity of Netherlandia where his mind could resume its normal functions. He was paralysed here, but when

he returned to the earth he would be able to think as a man and not as a shadow in a dream of shadows.

He rose hastily.

"I must not meet him—must not!" he stammered. "I cannot. You have stunned me. I must go away! I must go away!"

"Yes," she agreed.

He saw her as a shadow against the pale sky where faint and far the first stars appeared. Hurrying to her he fumbled for her hand, found it, held it loosely and shyly and uncertainly for a moment, and then let it fall and went, bare-headed, from the veranda, stumbling down the steps into the garden. Leila clapped her hands twice for the lamp to be brought.

But M. Cuvelier had delayed too long. As he reached the path leading down to the settlement Kingsclere, returning from his simpler hunting, took shape in a solid mass. A faint reek of gunpowder and heat floated from him. He was humming an air.

"Hullo, Cuvelier!" he exclaimed with maddening sameness as though nothing had happened. "Are you off? Not staying for food?"

Not staying for food? Did the clod have no soul, no feelings, no nerves? M. Cuvelier—his head ringing with the names of long lost people and long lost places, his heart aching with hunger, regret and fear—flung out his hand thrusting the phlegmatic creature away from him.

"No! No! No!" he cried, and plunged down the path into the tunnel the trees made.

The abruptness and agitation of this parting surprised Kingsclere, but his mind, sluggish with the

steamy heat of the valley, was not troubled by M. Cuvelier's moods. He was a queer, excitable fellow, that Frenchman. Kingsclere went on to the house. The sight of the bright veranda, with its promise of rest and ease after the heat of the day, was soothing. Leila was leaning against one of the posts, and looking out across the greying sea. As he mounted the steps she turned and welcomed him with her slow, sweet smile.

"Well, Lou, any luck?"

"Only four," he answered, drawing refreshment from her calm. "Oh, by the way," he went on casually, wishing to prolong the moment, "I met Cuvelier just now. What's the matter with him? He seemed funny."

"Did he? Well, he is, you know." But she had penetrated his ruse. "You're hot and tired—better get your bath now, dear. Dinner won't be long and you'll want time for a drink before it."

Well, she was right. There was no sense in delaying. They had all the evening before them. He nodded, and went, but pausing in the doorway said: "Send me in a whisky and soda will you, Leila? I'm dry."

"Yes. I think I'll have one myself. It's a dry kind of night. Go on now, Lulu, or everything will be spoiled."

He gave her a smile for the gift of his pet name and left her, humming the same air. It was the little dance tune the band had played at Pierre's long ago. As Leila prepared the drinks her glance rested meditatively on M. Cuvelier's topee which lay abandoned on a small side table.

Dinner was served and they ate in quiet companionship. Leila was in a reminiscent mood. She delighted Kingsclere by recalling details of their short married history which he had fancied she had forgotten. But she had not. They were all stored away —those precious moments they had shared—behind the smooth brow. He encouraged her, greedy to hear more.

"It is that air you were humming," she said. "It brings it all back. How lucky we were—meeting like that! . . ." The boy was not in the room. Kingsclere lifted her hand, and kissed it, shyly, as if the demonstration had been wrung from him by his emotion but made him feel a little awkward.

"Yes," he said, and wanted to say more but could not.

"Do eat that up before it gets cold, sweetheart," she chided, but she allowed him to see that she was pleased and she looked at her kissed fingers in happy meditation.

Her talk ran on, stopping always at the night when young Kennedy had introduced them, as though before that there was nothing, as though that night they had been born. Kingsclere accepted this as natural. He had become practised in forgetting; the dream he had created had become reality to him.

When, the meal over, they went out to the veranda the moon had risen, round and red. In its broad beam the restless ocean undulated and shimmered. The sky was empty and deep. Nearer at hand the light was diffused so that the palms glistened as if coated with frost. Stirred by the freshening breeze the fronds made waves of sound which rose and fell

and through which, low but distinguishable, came the mutter of the sea.

Silence descended on Leila and Kingsclere. They lay side by side in long chairs watching the night through the slot between railings and roof, serene, thinking. Kingsclere was enjoying complete content. Their talk had prepared him, and he was realising how all the rapture of the moon on palms and sea would have eaten into his heart if he had come to Netherlandia alone. How incomplete life had been! But now he could enjoy all this to the full. His work had been good and his reward was bliss.

With a sigh of satisfaction he turned so that he could see Leila, the epitome of his achievement. After the restlessness of fronds and waves the loveliness of her repose was emphasised. She was as white, still and remote as the moon, and yet, as the moon controlled the tides, so she, without effort or departure from her divine isolation, exercised her sway over every atom of his being. And how warmly alive she was; how much a woman of flesh and blood when she wished to be. Some old fellow long ago had made a statue so exquisite that he had loved it and it had come to life for him. Well, what kind of a girl had she proved to be? Like Leila, eh? But he was a greater craftsman than that old fellow. He had made the man, and the mate for the man.

His regard drew her attention. She turned with indolent ease, and they looked at each other, in his eyes the possessive pride of the artist.

Kingsclere was pleased they had embarked again upon that trick of theirs—that steady scrutiny which had become to him the very expression of their love.

He abandoned himself to it voluptuously. But, suddenly, without moving her head and still watching him, she had spoken. For a fraction of time his dreaming mind did not understand the words. They were no more than a clash against the placid current of his thoughts.

Then he realised that Leila had said: "Oh, Lou, I'll tell you something now. Cuvelier made a discovery about me to-night. That was why his manner seemed strange."

He could only repeat, stupidly: "Cuvelier?"

"Yes, he's realised at last what I've known all along. He's recognised in me the child who was his sweetheart years and years ago when we were little —when I was twelve or so. It was in Vence on the Alpes Maritimes. We played together among the olive trees in the shadow of the White Mountain."

Old memories haunted her eyes and voice.

He heard each word as a clear and separate thing. They marched into his ears, driving out thought with their irresistible and merciless onslaught. He sat up, pushing his hair back from his brow. His gaze was fixed on her with blank intensity, his lower jaw hung down. She lay on her side, one white arm bent beneath her head. Her lips had closed again in their deep, firm lines. It seemed incredible that from them had issued those alarming, invading sounds.

"But——? But——?"

He did not know what to say. Again he passed his hand over his hair, and he stirred uneasily as if testing whether he was awake.

"Why didn't you tell me?" The question came to his tongue unsought.

"I wanted you to have your bath before dinner was ruined," she explained.

He did not hear.

"Why have you told me now?" he found himself asking. "It's not like you." He was surprised to hear his voice saying that, and more surprised to realise how true it was.

"Pooh, why should I keep it a secret? It's not important. It's only the latest gossip of our village." But Kingsclere knew it was much more than that. "Poor man, he was quite upset. I suppose it made him feel so old." She smiled faintly at the recollection of how upset M. Cuvelier had been.

Kingsclere, also, was reminded of M. Cuvelier's agitation, but he did not smile. He felt chilled, numbed. He listened to the wind sighing and crying in the palms. Before him, unsolvable, was the riddle of her face. She had spoken as if, indeed, she told no more than a piece of gossip. But its meanings and implications were growing clearer and clearer to him. Cuvelier and Leila years and years ago when they were little. . . . He saw them playing in the shadow of a great White Mountain and among the olive trees. And that this echo should have been awakened in Netherlandia—most secure haven in all the world—dismayed and alarmed him. His head shook sadly from side to side.

"This is a pity," he mourned. "This is a pity."

"Why is it a pity?"

"He is of the past." His voice became louder.

"We agreed together that the past was dead. We buried the past together."

"We thought we had, but we were only human. I've sometimes fancied that it was because we had founded it on the impossible that we were so frightened for our happiness—so—so delicate with it, so gentle. We have lived together so carefully, like people in a house full of fragile treasures to which they had no right. Our happiness has been like something unreal and not of the world at all."

She raised her brows asking if this were not so. Some particular note in her words irked him. He puzzled over it. Then he knew. Already and for the first time, with the coming of Cuvelier from the past, she was questioning the permanence, the security, of their lives and love. Always before she had accepted with a spirit which disdained uncertainty. And the very manner in which she had spoken!—as if their love was something left behind and looked back upon with wonder and incredulity.

"We have buried the past!" he insisted.

"We thought we had," she said again. "And yet here it comes to resurrection. M. Cuvelier is the unescapable fact. We were not born that night in Saigon."

From his fear and disquiet—and stronger than either—a gust of anger rose. He hated the man who had intruded to destroy that which she had willingly forsworn to become the mate for Louis Kingsclere. This first reversal in his victorious career found him unprepared. He was appalled by the thought of M. Cuvelier as a skeleton from beyond the veil thrust suddenly into the happy feast of

his days, a reminder of mortal limitations and fallibility.

"But you—you want to dig up this past?" he cried accusingly.

"I do not," she said, not disputing, but on an even key stating a truth. "I have no reason for doing so. Do you?" She paused. Her face foiled him as completely as ever, but he was warned intuitively of a quickening of her interest, and, without knowing why, steeled his nerves for some inexplicable assault. It came in two short words.

"Could you?"

The start, like that caused by a quick stab of pain, would not be checked. The intention behind the words was hidden, but they pierced to the very heart of his secret. Had she realised that the man she had loved—the man she loved, he corrected hastily—was a mere sham? Had her calm eyes looked down into his soul while he had remained content to accept her as an enigma? As well try to question the moon as her face. The woman he loved was a mystery to him; he loved her because of her mystery. And she—supposing he were no longer a mystery to her? The frailness of the edifice he had built—that edifice which minutes before he had admired for its perfection—was horribly plain. He fancied it was collapsing about his ears, and remembered, vividly, that he had seen a solid city crumble to dust.

"What makes you say that?" he forced his tongue to ask, striving to hide the dread with which the answer was awaited.

But, in the instant, Leila was transfigured. She broke into a ripple of laughter, her eyes sparkled,

her face was lit with elfin merriment, and, sitting up she snatched his hands in hers, and leaned towards him to share the joke. The tension snapped. Fear was dispelled. Kingsclere emerged from the dark clouds of his emotions surprised that they had ever wrapped so sombrely and suddenly about him. They seemed foolish, as the fears of a nightmare do when the sleeper awakes to dawn and the chirruping of birds. Leila's eyes were sunshine, her laughter song.

"You great silly! You great, big, stupid, darling silly!"

She pushed him back into his chair, and quickly, lightly, joined him in it, resting her body along his, ruffling his hair, covering his mouth, his eyes, his brow with fluttering, merry kisses. He was intoxicated with relief and gratitude and delight.

Holding his face between her cool hands she looked down into his eyes in mirthful penitence.

"It's a shame to tease my poor sweetheart! I was a mean cat to make you miserable. What does old Cuvelier matter? We can't kill him, and there's no earthly reason why we should want to. Don't you see we've made our own lives apart, and that we have no past!—truly, truly, have no past! You know your Leila. Don't you see that if she hadn't been absolutely satisfied with our lives as they are she'd have made a big secret out of all this? Oh, Lou—Lulu, you're such a baby! I asked you *could* you dig up the past just to be sure. How did I know you were really happy and content? How did I know there weren't times when you regretted our bargain and thought I hadn't given you enough to compen-

sate for all you flung away just because I asked you to? It was wicked of me to enjoy teasing you—and I did—but I won't do it again. So, oh! forgive me, Lulu, and laugh with me and love me!"

Everything was answered. In the clear light of her eyes he saw that his fears had been due only to cowardice. With what preposterous and disloyal phantoms had he allowed himself to be haunted? There were no spectres now. The memory of M. Cuvelier was swept away as a dead leaf is blown before a refreshing breeze. She was all passion, tenderness and love. And he, grotesquely, had come near to doubting her because he doubted his own powers!

They were alone on their moonlit height, alone in the silver sky.

CHAPTER XIII

The light of the house burned where the dark mass of the hill gave place to star-bright sky. It looked far, unattainable, like a phenomenon of the heavens rather than anything connected with the solid earth. M. Cuvelier gazed up at it longingly. He knew he had only to call for a boy and a lantern to make the ascent, but he did not do so. For the third night in succession he turned away, sighing, and went along Wilhelminastraat by the black still waters towards Li-Goon's. He had not gone a dozen paces before he hesitated, paused, and turned again. His eyes sought that bright beacon which neither called nor warned, but simply rested in the sky.

"I am a fool," he thought bitterly. What reason had he for staying away? Had not Marie lain in his arms, and told him, of her own volition, the very thing which added to passion the mysterious and precious quality of love? Surely now more than ever he should be pressing forward? The goal was nearer; the prize richer beyond saying. He rehearsed once more the memory of those moments. But he found no enlightenment. Her motives and her feelings remained obscured. The strangeness of keeping such a secret, the strangeness of the revelation, continued to bewilder while holding his interest fascinated. He conjured up her tormenting presence.

The light he watched became a symbol, expressing her magic and her beauty. She was a cool flame

high above him. He might have dared the ascent to Kingsclere's house no matter at what cost, but he knew that when he had done so he would find her still above him, still beyond his reach. On the other hand, was it not equally probable that she was waiting to be won more certainly and more wonderfully than any woman he had ever desired before? But he feared and doubted and hesitated to put it further to the test. She was not as other women; she was Marie. Was not that all the more reason then? . . .

Round and round in the familiar circle his thoughts went. He recognised the inhibitions which held him back, and tried to conquer them. But they were too strong. They defied reason and experience and the flesh. Crushed by logic, burned up by passion, they rose again, unescapable, insurmountable. There it was, and there could be no evasion: she was not a woman, but Marie, a memory, a dream, a sacrament, the very soul of the dear lost days and youth.

M. Cuvelier's wide experience could not help. It only qualified him to deal with women. Faced with an ascent to the stars he was irresolute and diffident. Meanwhile Li-Goon's remained. One had lived in Netherlandia and could continue to do so. He turned his back on the hill, and walked with swinging, quick strides towards the outpost's hub.

The sounds of their talk and the smell of their tobacco came to him through the hot night. He made a gesture of distaste and impatience. How foolish it all seemed!—how worthless! They meant nothing to him, nor he to them. What did it matter what they thought? Or what stories they told? Or what their hopes and fears were? Nothing!—all this was

nothing to him! His own weakness mocked him. It was against his nature. He, Paul Cuvelier, was not the man to be wasting time down on the earth when opportunities unimagined a month before called him on to glorious adventure upon the heights.

Even while he affirmed this, he opened the door and walked into the bamboo cage.

They greeted him hilariously, raising their glasses to him and hammering applause with their feet.

"Again we win!" shouted Tom Thompson, slapping his knob of stomach.

"Our fatal fascination——!" said Boyce.

"He's getting wise to what I knew in the first place," Mat Bradley affirmed. He shook his head up and down in short contemptuous jerks. Yes, he had known all along. What fools all these people were! —no more fit to look after themselves than Pedro was.

"It is necessary then to buy you a drink to silence you!" said M. Cuvelier with a show of good-humour. He clapped his hands and smiled sardonically at them, being much too wise to betray annoyance. Li-Goon's veranda was no place for the display of sacred sentiments.

The Chinese appeared and took their orders. M. Cuvelier threw his long body down in a chair, and tugged at his moustache. He wanted to think of something to say to them—some argument to launch. That was his natural rôle, and above all it was necessary to appear natural. Beneath his thin skin of cynicism M. Cuvelier hid a sensitive and delicately balanced soul.

"The third night running he's deserted his lady

for us!" chuckled Thompson, running his hands in mock bewilderment through his silver hair.

It was on the tip of M. Cuvelier's tongue to point out forcibly that she was not his "lady," but he mastered the impulse. The talk about Leila on that veranda was quite painful enough without saying anything which would lead to further and coarser references. He could only bear it by remembering that to these benighted ones she was merely a woman. Logically, then, he could not blame them, for in his own talk he had never spared any woman either. They were fair game. He took the comfort to him, but at the same time wished that he had stayed at home. This place and these dullards only distressed him. And yet, being a sociable creature by nature, he knew that his empty, silent house would have been unendurable in his present state of mind.

"It's the nice, quiet, easy-going husband's got him bluffed, isn't it, Cuvelier?" inquired Mat Bradley. "Come on, now—out with it! It is, isn't it?" His question cracked like a whip, commanding a prompt and docile answer.

"Ah, who can tell?" countered M. Cuvelier lightly, his liquid brown eyes defying them to pierce his mask and read the hatred which the question fanned into a flame. He took his drink from Li-Goon. That man, that clod, up there in the quiet of the sky with Marie in his hairy arms! His teeth met on the glass. The liquor tasted like gall. But outwardly he remained their familiar. He smiled more broadly at them, with a flash of white teeth, "One must show some consideration for your dullness,

your lack of entertainment," he said. "One of some intelligence is needed to save you from the pit of boredom you dig. Then, too, our numbers grow less with van Rossen gone. And the Evan Jones—'e is not even as faithful as I am. 'E is not 'ere again, I see. What matters with 'im? In all the years 'e has not stayed away so much!"

"Oh," laughed Tom Thompson, "he's much too good for us these days. He's keeping better company and growing a beard to look dignified enough for it. Your friend Analoolie's working for him. They're having great old times, I'll tell you. They're as hoarse as a couple of crows with hymns and prayers and whatnot."

"Ah," sighed M. Cuvelier, "when two holy men get together what suffering!—what pain! This religion—ah!" He rolled his eyes at the bamboo ceiling.

"We ought to do something about it, I reckon," Boyce said. "It gives me the shudders to think of what may be going on in that hut with the two of them there and that infernal cockatoo joining in the fun."

"Yes," nodded M. Cuvelier seriously, "black masses, indeed! We should do something."

"I passed his place this afternoon," Boyce proceeded, "and there he was confabbing with that damned boy, as thick as two thieves. Analoolie was sitting at his feet, and Evan Jones was talking to him like a Dutch uncle. That's crook, I reckon. You've got to draw the —— colour line. Can't have a white doing that kind of thing!"

"Oh, I don't know," Thompson said lazily. "What

harm's it do? They know well enough he's not like us—they know he's mad."

"Ah!" ejaculated M. Cuvelier, pouncing like a squirrel which spies a nut, "and that 'e is mad does that make 'im any different from us? We are all mad, my friends. Nobody would continue to live if 'e was not mad. You—you sit there thinking you are sane. I tell you there is no such thing as a sane man living. We keep up a pretence of sanity, that is all. We deceive even ourselves—but it remains a deception. I ask you, my friends, to look at men—look at the sufferings they endure and the 'ope that ever springs in them, look at their murders and their marriages, their wars and their peaces, the children they beget so furiously that they may suffer also. Look, I ask you, at their incredible industry, their endeavours, their desires, their mighty plans—these men who may be snuffed out: puff! at any moment. Look, my friends, at us. 'Ere we sit alive. Good! But to-morrow night—who can say? Only one thing is certain: eighty years from to-night not one of us will even be food for the worms. We shall 'ave been digested and dismissed by the worms! Yet we imagine that we matter! We are concerned with our affairs as of the importance. And you would tell me that the Evan Jones is different from us because that 'e is mad. Bah! I say to you, bah!"

His eloquent hands waved them away, banishing them as illusions, shadows, wraiths of dust. They applauded, urged him to go on and get it all off his chest, asked rude questions about the state of his bowels. M. Cuvelier, a dew of enthusiasm on his brow, sat back in triumph. He was still himself, and

had demonstrated the fact. Also, it was a pleasing philosophy suited to his mood. But, he admitted in his heart, the knowledge that one was mad did not lessen the poignancy of the madman's emotions.

"What you want is more exercise, Cuvelier," Mat Bradley gave judgment, a little out of patience. "Your liver's all to hell. You ought to get away with Thompson and Boyce on their show."

"Yes," said Thompson, "why don't you? Come in on it. You're welcome. You can be in on the ground-floor. I was only waiting until I could get a word in edgeways to ask you."

"It is very nice of you all to be so considerate for my liver and so 'ospitable," said M. Cuvelier. "But this 'show'—it is the first I 'ear of it. And what 'show' is this?"

Thompson leaned forward and tapped impressively on the table with a stubby forefinger.

"Oil——!" he said, speaking a sacred, magic word.

It was Tom Thompson's doom to be forever a millionaire in prospect. Fantastic wealth always waited in To-morrow for him. It had when he dwelt in cities and promoted companies. It still awaited him now that the cities had cast him out, and he dwelt with the other flotsam in Netherlandia. Gold, silver, tin, diamonds, pearls—all these at one time or another were to be picked up by the happy Thompson. But his fingers never touched them. As he was a reckless man and a rogue this failure seemed strange, but he had the misfortune of being an incorrigible romantic. And nothing could change that. From each enterprise he returned to Netherlandia

disappointed but not disillusioned, to drink and idle for six months rebuilding his stomach, until another will-o'-the-wisp lured him away again. As a matter of fact his only luck and his best means of moneymaking lay in cards, but this was a mere means to a livelihood, and so, inevitably, Tom Thompson found cards dull. He wanted the big money. And now oil was the means to that end. He had the story from a native —a most circumstantial story. Inland from a point two hundred miles down the coast, in country which on description could not help being full of oil, the water was undrinkable.

"And why?" asked Thompson, cocking his head on one side. M. Cuvelier, moody, had no suggestion to offer. "I'll tell you. It's because, as the boy says, 'Heap plenty too much kerosene stop along top of him!' You see?—oil!" He spread out his hands on the table, and beamed behind his twinkling glasses. He radiated faith. Doubt seemed impossible.

Although M. Cuvelier appeared to be weighing these statements he was not thinking of them at all. He knew too well how Tom Thompson's fortunes vanished in fever-haunted swamps, were washed away—with heavy loss of life—by hurricanes, or were riddled with barbed and poisoned spears. His interest in the expedition had nothing to do with oil.

"Ah," he said. "And 'ow do we get there? 'Ow long shall it take for us all to become the Rockefellers?"

"The *Hirondelle* will be going down that way next run. She'll take us. I figure we'll be away four months for a start."

M. Cuvelier lay back and considered the bamboo bars of their cage. Away four months? The prospect was alluring and distressing. He knew he could not hope to think down on that black beach while a star shone tantalisingly above him. If he could get away, escape, he would have a respite, and, breathing a freer air, would become himself again and be able to decide what was to be done.

"You may as well come as loaf about here," urged Boyce. "When we're gone there'll be nobody except Mat and Evan Jones. And Mat won't stay more than a month."

"So," agreed M. Cuvelier. That was another point. He certainly did not relish the idea of being left alone in Netherlandia with Mat Bradley. A fancy occurred to him. He saw himself skipping nimbly beside Pedro while Mat Bradley, hands thrust into belt, looked on with critical eyes and gave sharp orders. M. Cuvelier had not grown any fonder of Mat Bradley. The bullying, bludgeoning ways of the simple Pedro's master did not appeal to M. Cuvelier who had his own numerous opinions, who liked to strike his attitudes unrebuked, who was independent.

"And the beauty of it is it'll keep you out of mischief for a bit," said Tom Thompson. "In fact for good—because when we've struck oil you won't be worrying about any bits o' skirt—not hereabouts anyway." He jerked his pipe back and upwards.

M. Cuvelier had not needed that reminder, but mischief was the word for it. He was facing the situation squarely for the first time. In his bones was fear of the house on the hill. He had a pre-

monition of disaster threatening from that strange altar, though in what form he could not judge yet. While he remained in Netherlandia this knowledge would not keep him away from the flame. For three days he had resisted, but, if he stayed, inevitably he would flutter back. Caution and reason urged him to be gone while there was yet time. The danger, the fault, did not lie in Marie—he could admit no wrong there—but in the circumstances in which he had found her again and in himself. It would have been insane not to seize this opportunity which offered a truce for consideration.

"The *Hirondelle* will be in in three days' time and'll sail the same night," Thompson was explaining. "Well, what about it?"

M. Cuvelier's teeth snapped together. He took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"It is 'ot to-night," he complained, and then: "Yes, of course I go with you. The chance it is too good to miss!"

They approved his decision, and he was bitterly amused by their approval because they knew nothing. They thought he was going to look for oil! . . . They did not guess the conflict waged in his heart, nor the pain which had been set there. But the resolve was taken. He would not even call to say au revoir. He dared not. He would simply go away. Deep in him was the tormenting conviction that he would never see her again.

CHAPTER XIV

Tiny, foolish creatures, drawn out of the safe darkness, did brief and frenzied dances about the lamp which, for this reason, had been moved to the furthest corner of the veranda.

The trio sat in the thin margin of the light. Their talk had flagged and the constraint grew more evident. The two men had much to say to each other but it could not be said, and the knowledge of unspoken antagonism had gradually pressed more heavily, and, at last, had crushed even the pretence at conversation. They were relieved when Leila spoke in a manner which revealed that an idea had occurred to her. She turned to her husband with a movement which struck him as different. It was Gallic, foreign to her usual poise—a quick little gesture of the hands and a lift of the shoulders. He heard, also, that rare shade of accent which—for some reason Kingsclere remembered—young Kennedy had mentioned as one of the charms of the unknown girl called Leila whom he wished his friend to meet.

"Would you mind, Louis?—I have a whim to talk in French. It seems years since I last used what, after all, is as much my native language as English. I shan't have the chance again for months. Be a dear and say 'yes'—just for a little while. You wouldn't mind, would you, Lulu?"

Kingsclere did mind. The suggestion might have been made with the deliberate intention of emphasis-

ing how much he was outside the particular interest they shared. But he knew such a thought wronged Leila, and fought down his annoyance, urging that the desire was natural enough and that she could not be expected to guess his feelings. He could trust her absolutely—that went without saying—the request was a tribute to his faith. But, for a breath, he had to hesitate, unwilling to agree and yet placed in a position where, if he did not, he must appear boorish and evil-minded. Her steady eyes watched him in the certainty that the little boon would be granted, her lips and voice pleaded so sweetly. And in the circumstances he could afford to be generous. Cuvelier had behaved decently in staying away, and had only turned up now to announce that on the next evening he would be leaving Netherlandia for months. The comforting belief had sprung up that they would be troubled by him no more. Kingsclere felt sure that M. Cuvelier would not come back.

"Carry on," he said, after that brief pause, as easily as he could.

Leila laughed like a child granted permission to play.

"You're a darling," she declared. "I know it's shockingly rude of me to even suggest such a thing, but it would be rather fun. As long as you don't mind——!"

He confirmed his agreement with a nod and a smile.

"It is the 'andsome courtesy after my months of struggling with your tongue," said M. Cuvelier. "I 'ave the great appreciation." He bowed acknowledgment.

"As a matter of fact I'm rather tired to-night. Don't blame me if I doze off for a while, that's all."

"I shall teach you French!" Leila announced, and turned to M. Cuvelier to ask, Kingsclere gathered, whether this would not be an admirable idea.

The moon had not risen yet, and the stars were veiled by unseen clouds. Sea and palms were still in a heavy thunder-hush. No breeze stirred. Even the insects had ceased to shrill. The world was numbed. This sense of paralysis extended to Kingsclere while he sat—his skin prickling with the electricity in the atmosphere—and listened to the quick exchanges between the man he hated and the woman he loved. The oddness of the situation gripped him despite his irritation. A corpse, he mused, at its own funeral might feel as he did. These familiar people were now of another world. Their voices were audible, but their words could not be understood; their faces were visible—the one vivacious, the other calm—but he had no power to read what thoughts passed in the minds behind them. They spoke together, too, of years in which he had lived but in which he was now dead. Strange . . . and hateful! But in justice to Leila he hid his feelings. After all life had been very quiet for her. She did not have much variety. To suffer this if it gave her pleasure was the least he could do.

He appreciated how constantly her eyes turned to him. She understood, and showed keen solicitude. He did his best to respond with good spirit. But what a mercy it would be when this tormenting intruder had gone! He looked at the well-groomed, handsome Frenchman. Beyond the fact that he was a foreigner

there was nothing about his appearance or manner to which Kingsclere could take exception. But his quarrel was not with Cuvelier, the man; it was with Cuvelier, the symbol. And the two aspects could not be dissociated. How long would this go on? It was ghastly.

Louis Kingsclere was not alone in his appreciation of the peculiar qualities of the moment.

"It is so droll," M. Cuvelier was saying. "It is only fitting that our last talk together should be like this, fantastic, painful as something in a dream to me and to him, oh my——"

"Be careful," Leila interposed, "if you do not want to make it more painful for you both. I have gained this little parting gift for you, monsieur, but there must not be too much fervour. Remember there are words in French which have become universal. It is the right language for some things—it is the Esperanto of some things. Avoid those words."

"I had forgotten, but shall remember. I say with my heart the things which neither tongue nor eye may say. And that is why this last talk is so apt. It is as bewitched as I am, as our entire meeting is. I, my——" He checked himself, with a helpless gesture. "I am not one who is easily bewitched. I have never been bewitched before. I think you know that."

"And yet—bewitched and all, you are going away!" She mentioned the point not as something deplorable or to be condemned, but merely as of interest in its revelation of the strangeness of human nature. While she spoke she glanced at Kingsclere again, apologising frankly for being detained so far away from him.

"Cannot you see that it is the very reason why I must go?" said M. Cuvelier, by an effort keeping his voice to a conversational note and his expression in harmony. "Listen, I shall tell you something. That evening when I first took you in my arms I thought I loved you. I was wrong. I desired you only, desired you as any man may desire any woman, desired you even as I have desired other women though never before so strongly, with such madness. Good! If it had stayed at that then there would have been no need for me to go away. Success would have been divine; failure a calamity but not a fatal one. You follow?"

"Oh, yes," said Leila. "So far it is most simple." She deliberated on M. Cuvelier and his feelings.

"But when you showed the witchcraft in which our meeting was involved then everything was changed. Consider the emotions aroused! Life had not meant much to me. I had wasted it, and it had repaid me with disillusion and disappointment until I prided myself that I had beaten it at last by resigning from it, becoming a spectator, an onlooker, an idler. But all the time I had regrets. It is inevitable. I, Paul Cuvelier, who had started out so bravely —why had I fallen down to this?—to Netherlandia? It seemed such a waste, such a folly. I told myself always that soon I would make the effort and rise again. But the time never came. And then you with your magic suddenly wiped away all those dead years between. You made me a boy again. You gave me back all I had flung away, by banishing the knowledge of the years in which it had been wasted. The

grime fell from me. I loved you then. I went beyond desire. You were the elixir of youth."

"You are eloquent, monsieur."

He studied her in momentary silence.

"I do not understand you—you are just beyond me," he protested. "Do you mock me or merely help me with your quiet words? I am not eloquent. The spells make me dumb. Is it then that you mock me? I do not understand you."

"I am Marie," she said, and her lips closed in their full lines.

M. Cuvelier darted a glance at Kingsclere and saw that the clod was not looking at him but out at the night. It was well. He knew that his face told too much in that moment while she played upon the chords of his heart. A moment passed before he could speak.

"Yes, that is it all: you are Marie. To me you are not a woman. I see you as a beautiful ghost—a vision." He spoke more quickly running the words together for safety. "And therefore it is right that I should find you with strangeness; that circumstances and my love should make me powerless; that you should utterly bewilder me. I love and am afraid. I worship and cannot understand. Any other woman, yes!—it would be easy, even here, even now. But this would not be happening with any other woman. It is only you. To you the ordinary rules of life will not apply. You are of the past. You dwell there, holy, unapproachable. It is only your ghost I see. For me the past is dead."

Leila's features revealed cool sympathy.

"For you, also?" she asked, meditatively.

"Yes! I have flung it away. I have forgotten and am forgotten. You cannot be flesh and blood. And yet I want you, crave you——!"

"You are going away. Perhaps, you are wise. No good can come of loving a ghost."

"Yes, I am going away!" M. Cuvelier assented, grimly. "But I have met you and part from you knowing nothing of you, save that you are Marie. Before I go, that I may think of you on this mad expedition as something which really happened, tell me of yourself. What have the years done to you?—save *that*!" He succeeded in turning his scornful gesture towards Kingsclere into a mere general movement.

"The years?—they have done nothing to me. Why should they? I have lived through them—that is all."

She preferred to remain Marie. M. Cuvelier lost the time sense. Yesterday and to-day seemed to be all one.

Leila had turned away from him to her husband.

"Only two words more, Lulu," she said in English. "It's such a novelty. I'm quite enjoying it!" Her eyes confirmed the words. The accent had gone again. Her grave smile thanked him.

Kingsclere stirred, making a pretence that he had been almost dozing. Indeed, he felt like one awakened, and from a wretched sleep. For the first time in months he had been obsessed by the thought that he should make the effort to remember. Jealousy gave glamour to that which he lacked. He believed that with the will he could draw aside the veil. His infirmity—for, while he listened to their chatter, his blessing had become an infirmity—was his own fault.

He had never had the determination to recover. At that very moment had he wished it, he fancied, the thing might have been accomplished. He imagined himself suddenly breaking in on their reminiscences with the announcement that he remembered so-and-so and such-and-such and that he was not Louis Kingsclere at all, that Louis Kingsclere was an hallucination, and that the man they saw before them was——

The name dwelt on his tongue. The others were so busy that they did not see his hands clench. But, as quickly as it swept up, the wave of impulse passed. He dared not; could not. The complete upheaval of his universe which must follow was too tremendous to be contemplated. Again he saw that he had gone too far to turn back; again he was a coward.

"There is no more to be said then," Leila was remarking to M. Cuvelier. "You are right: I am of your past and the past is dead. My husband and I are of the present to each other. I live for each of you, as it were, in different lives. I wish you every good fortune, my friend—in your quest for oil."

"Good fortune or bad, I am going," M. Cuvelier insisted, clinging tenaciously to that.

But Leila no longer gave him her attention. She was thanking her husband with a gentle flow of English words for his patience. And Louis Kingsclere was assuring her that it was nothing—nothing! He was jubilant. Discretion was better than the valour of fools. Even jealousy was dissolved. Such a small testing was no price to pay. And it would soon be over. Then the life of Louis Kingsclere would flow

on again like a calm river passing unruffled through the turmoils and troubles of the world.

Elation and misery warred in M. Cuvelier. The thing had been done. He could admit now that he had feared his strength from the moment of realising that he could not go without seeing her again. If Leila had been a wife whom he had hoped to enjoy, a final effort in the good cause would have been natural and commendable. But the power which drew him to the shrine on the hill disturbed his Southern soul. For M. Cuvelier, like all men, was wise only in his talk of love.

He waited just as long as was decent, telling in a forced way of the plans for the expedition, and then—because all this was anti-climax and useless pain—made his apologies and rose.

"I have much to do. You will excuse me."

They would. They walked with him to the steps. M. Cuvelier shouted for his boy who appeared with a lantern. They stood in silence for a second in the numb night.

"Good-bye, monsieur," said M. Cuvelier. After the slightest pause he extended his hand.

"Good-bye! Good luck, Cuvelier!" said Kingsclere, and he could not quite conceal the joy with which he sped their guest. He gripped the proffered hand strongly, almost in friendship.

M. Cuvelier turned to Leila. The victory he had won still supported him. It cleared his mind and gave him strength. Again he was impressed by the queerness of all this. He was parting from Marie, and he could not even call her by name.

"Adieu!" he said, taking her hand. The meaning

of the moment—unexpressed but tacitly recognised by all of them—gave him privileges. He bent his head, and put her fingers to his lips.

Louis Kingsclere had room for no emotion save his immense relief.

"Adieu, Paul!" said Leila. Out of her secret world she smiled down at his glossy head.

He did not look at them again, but turned and went quickly into the garden, an erect and resolute figure. The boy fell into step behind him, swinging the lantern. They went along the path, a man and a shadow moving in a golden globe, and, turning the corner of the house, disappeared abruptly as if they had dropped into the pit of night.

"Thank God!" breathed Louis Kingsclere.

He leaned against the railing. His face was grey. The muscles of his body were relaxed as if after a long strain. Leila looked at him, and realising that at last they were alone together again, he forced a smile, but knew there was weariness in it. She moved to him, attentive and grave, and took his hands.

"Why, Louis, you're ill! It's fever!"

He drew her closer.

"No, darling," he answered, "only it's been a strange evening—and oh, I'm so glad he's gone!"

She lifted up her face to kiss him.

"You silly," she chided. "You *are* jealous——! But it's so needless. The man means less than nothing to me, and as for his feelings towards me—why, I'm not a grown-up person to him at all. I'm simply a ghost out of the past—a ghost of the child he used to play with years and years ago when we were young."

She spoke fondly, reasonably, allaying his fancies. He saw that she watched hungrily for signs that she had succeeded and had no idea that she had touched the very feature of the affair which hurt him most. He forced another smile, but his lips trembled at the thought of how nearly he had been driven to the shattering of their dream.

"I know, sweetheart," he said. "I'm an ass about the whole thing. But somehow—oh, I don't know! It's absolutely unreasonable but I loathe that man. Anyway, the main thing is he's gone. He won't come back ever, will he?"

"I hope not! Oh, I hope not!" cried Leila with sudden, vibrant intensity, and locking her arms about him kissed him with passion which told that she loved him for what he had suffered and suggested that she, too, had suffered with him, but strangely, rejoiced in her pain.

CHAPTER XV

The last night in Netherlandia was being celebrated in the established fashion. On the morrow the *Hirondelle* would bear them away to strenuous endeavours far removed from even such amenities as Li-Goon's provided. Adventurers setting forth from the outpost on their queer and perilous missions always did so with sore heads, bloodshot eyes and unsteady hands. It was a custom, and, in a sense, a necessary one, for had they faced in sober senses the prospects of toil, suffering and hardship which awaited them they might well have been daunted and remained in the sanctuary of their lazy stagnation. Though they would have scoffed at the charge they were primarily lotus-eaters and dreamers, needing the stimulating and at the same time deadening effects of alcohol to become men of action.

Tom Thompson, very drunk and more venerable in appearance than ever, addressed them. He was unsteady on his feet, but supported himself by leaning on the table. His foggy eyes, behind the windows of his steel-rimmed glasses, saw the gathering, it seemed, as a great host of shareholders. He was ponderously dignified, and his round face shone with that heartening enthusiasm which is food and drink to the small investor.

"Gen'men," he was saying, "think of what it means —oil! Think of the American oil kings, think of the Dutch, gen'men. Thish ish oil age. Coal ish done. Oil! Oil for everything——"

"Including babies!" Boyce interjected.

Thompson frowned and shook his head in reproach.

"I am serious, gen'men," he said. "Thish time next year we shall be millionaires, and, gen'men, I make that statement after—that statement after due consideration. I venture to predict that we shall never sit here again as poor men. The next time we are here together we shall be rich, waiting for the *Geervliet* to take us to London, New York or Paris. And that we——"

"What's the matter with Sydney, anyway?" asked the Australian. "Sydney'll do me!"

Tom Thompson tried to think of a crushing retort to silence this noisy shareholder who persisted in interrupting the chairman, but, failing, remarked with a sweeping gesture of generosity "Anywhere! Anywhere! Oil, gen'men, oil!" He held out his hands, asking them, as reasonable men, what more they could wish to hear, and then, losing his balance collapsed into his chair, and, beaming benevolence, tossed his silver hair back from his brow. His air conveyed that any further criticism of the board would be out of order. They made noises of assent and approval.

The tireless Li-Goon brought another round of drinks at that moment. Boyce signed the chit, and put his arm affectionately round the Chinaman's fat middle. Li-Goon stood still, an image in faded green pyjamas, his only real concern the tray which he balanced before him.

"And here's poor old Li-Goon," said Boyce with tipsy emotion. "Poor old Li-Goon!—last night we'll see him for a hell of a time. To-morrow, no customers

—only Mat. And when the new port officer turns up it's long odds on he'll be a wowser and won't drink at all. 'S shame, Li-Goon." He squeezed the plump body consolingly. "Wha's going to happen to him while we're all away making our fortunes? He'll be ruined. Still, good business to-night, eh, Li-Goon? Everybody here—even Mr. Carrington and Evan Jones. Just as well! Just as ——— well! You been a good friend to us, Li-Goon, you old bastard!"

Li-Goon indulged them with a smile mechanical and meaningless, as if his parchment mask had been suddenly stretched. They saw him as a symbol of the ease they were leaving; they hailed him as a benefactor and comforter, expressing appreciation with oaths and obscenities which, in other settings, would have rendered them liable to police prosecution. They were filled with sentimental regret by the thought that soon Li-Goon would be far beyond call.

M. Cuvelier, who had been quiet and abstracted throughout the evening and had been drinking with stubborn and joyless industry, aroused himself. His eyes were moist; his dark head wagged dolorously. When their chorus had subsided he expressed his feelings.

"Without Li-Goon Netherlandia would be the 'ell," he declared. "I, Paul Cuvelier, tell to you all that Li-Goon 'as been our salvation!"

There would have been acclamation for this, but before it could be voiced an interruption came which silenced them in blank surprise.

"No!" said Evan Jones, firmly. "No!"

He had taken his place on the outskirts of their party again that night. They had scarcely noticed his

presence, and his temporary desertion had been forgotten. Evan Jones was there, a little apart, humming his hymns, muttering his Bible tags, smoking his herbal cigarettes—it was as if a familiar piece of furniture had been replaced. But now, abruptly and dramatically, for the first and only time in their experience he intruded upon them. Had he been a mute the sound of his voice ringing crisply and decisively in their ears could not have caused a greater sensation.

A general stir and an inquiring murmur of astonishment followed. Those whose backs were turned to him swung round. A hush settled. They peered at him, as if he had done something extraordinary and they could not imagine what was to follow. Li-Goon himself took a distant interest. Mr. Carrington raised his mulish face. Brows were wrinkled in interrogation.

"No!" Evan Jones asserted again with sharpness and certainty.

They continued to gape. A stranger had been discovered in their midst. The shadow who had dwelt with them so long had become a man. The trader rose deliberately. Turning the straight chair on which he always sat, he rested one knee on it, grasping its back in his thin, brown hands. So he faced them—a stunted, round-shouldered figure with wisps of hair plastered across his skull and a fungus growth of beard covering his jaws. Their attention was seized and held by his eyes. Though usually lustreless and empty those eyes, deep set above the high cheekbones, burned now with a fierce light, regarding the gathering in contempt and scorn.

"Look you, there is no salvation for you," said Evan Jones. "No salvation!" His voice rose; his eyes blazed at them and yet he seemed unconscious of their presence. "Hear now this, O foolish people and without understanding, which have eyes and see not, which have ears and hear not: in all the years here in Netherlandia I have been your companion and yet have dwelt apart from your wickedness. I have prayed for you and have advised you with the Word. I have tried to lead you by stealth. You have not heeded me. I have failed with you. In you I see vanity under the sun. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. You are fools beyond salvation. I abandon you!" He flung his arms apart, casting the men of Netherlandia from him. They did not mock, but sat watching and marvelling in a dazed way. "I have a new mission now and shall be with you no more. I go to do the task appointed to me. Thus sayeth the Lord: 'Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen whither they be gone.' That is the task to which I am called, look you. Who are you that I should linger among you? Is it not written that surely He scorneth the scorner; but He giveth grace unto the lowly? I go to the lowly. You will come back to this veranda, but I shall be here no more. I leave you, saying: 'Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till He come and rain righteousness upon you.' And now I go——!"

He set the chair aside and walked from among them. His rapt earnestness clad him in dignity. They forgot he had been the little crazy trader, and they

could not tell what he had become. In the open doorway he paused, silhouetted against the stars, and drew up his body to its meagre height. His right hand flung up, a finger pointing to the sky.

" 'O, earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!' " he cried.

His burning eyes looked through them and through Li-Goon's house at something beautiful and inspiring beyond. Their concentrated attention had no effect upon him. With his rigid arm still pointing on high he turned without another word, stepped out and was gone. They were looking into the empty darkness.

A spell bound them. The noises of the night and the murmur of the waves on the beach came in.

"Well, I'll be damned——!" said Boyce then on a strained note.

They returned to consciousness of themselves and each other with sheepish glances. The intensity of the moment before seemed shameful. They wondered what could have possessed them, and hoped their emotions had passed unnoticed. With embarrassment they saw that they had allowed Evan Jones to make fools of them. Why should they have listened to his preaching and even been impressed by it?

"That little man—!" gasped M. Cuvelier, fumbling for a cheroot and smiling wryly, "that little man—'e 'as come near to frightening me. 'E took me by the surprise. 'E 'ad me—what is it that you say?—'bluffed' for that moment. What 'as come upon 'im after all these years? Such fire—! Such power—! 'E should 'ave been a Jesuit!"

"He certainly said a mouthful, didn't he?" Mat

Bradley growled. His tone and expression suggested that one of the circus ponies had attempted to "savage" him to his indignation and amazement.

"Very good speesh!—very!" Thompson declared. He had collapsed into more complete intoxication. "Drink hish health—mush drink hish health. Li-Goon—drinks! Quick, savee?"

The veranda reverted to normal. With glasses and bottles in the mysterious interior of his house Li-Goon worked legerdemain by which he seemed able to serve everyone in no time at all. They drank deeply, and had them filled again. Subconsciously they were eager to minimise the effect of Evan Jones's outburst. They were men to be moved only to ribaldry by threats of damnation. But there was something deeper than eloquence—beyond religion—in the words his unpractised tongue had found. In them had rung the echo of strange and pitiful things and the portent of strange and pitiful things to come. His hearers had the sensitiveness of crude men; they were more easily touched than the cultured; they heard more than they knew. The emotions he had stirred troubled them, however. They hid such weaknesses; they escaped from them; they fled from the unknown. Liquor aided. The significance of the interruption to the festivities of their last night was thrust aside. They contrived to discuss it as a peculiar display on the part of the mad little Welshman.

"He got away with it, you know," said Mat Bradley aggrievedly. "He got away with it——!"

"I wanted to laugh, but you couldn't very well; poor little devil!" said Boyce.

"Besh speesh of evening," Tom Thompson averred repeatedly, swaying in his chair.

M. Cuvelier had been aroused from his brooding.

"I 'ave it," he announced, snapping his fingers. "This—it is the work of that Analoolie. Consider—! There is that barbarian with the unfortunate Evan Jones. Both are mad as could be. They 'ave the same madness." He tapped his brow. "The result—? That Analoolie, 'e 'as made our friend worse. They 'ave been talking together—'olding, as I 'ave said, the good God alone knows what black masses—and this 'Lost Tribe' bug 'e 'as bitten the poor Evan Jones. This is not good. It must be stopped. We must send away this Analoolie, or no good comes of it. Yes, we must send 'im away!"

The truth of this diagnosis and the wisdom of the remedy were evident. In a fine flood of indignation against Analoolie and affectionate sympathy for Evan Jones they decided that their last task in Netherlandia would be the virtuous one of driving forth the Lost Tribesman and teaching him such a lesson that he would not dare to return. Racial pride was outraged; pity for the weak was quickened. There was even talk of taking charge of Evan Jones for his own good. But all the talk delayed action. So many points had to be considered, and they had more drinks to help them. The whole problem became tremendously difficult, involved and wide. They insisted on doing the very best by Evan Jones—nothing less would suffice. The debate wandered through lunacy and lunacy laws to missionaries, the Pope, evolution and monkeys, back to the Oil Age. Evan Jones and Analoolie receded and were finally lost

in a fog of words, fumes and smoke. Then, remembering that on the morrow Li-Goon's would be astern, they dropped the whole troublesome argument and became hilarious. Thompson started a lewd and endless song. They took up the chorus, beating time on the bamboo floor with their feet. The hours hazed by.

Presently Mr. Carrington, very wan and melancholy but with every appearance of sobriety, raised his long body from his chair.

"Old Man's sailing first thing," he said. "Better shove along."

They agreed. There was nothing more to be done. Departures were well organised in Netherlandia. Experience had laid down the rules. Already their effects were aboard and Li-Goon had been paid sums on account and would wait for the balance. There were no irritating details to be cleared up. They were free to go, and were finished with Netherlandia.

"Come on! Come on!" each urged the other, and they sang: "Here we go gathering nuts and may!"

Shadows with lanterns appeared outside, glasses were drained, bottles were kicked over, chairs were thrust away, Li-Goon stood bowing, and they staggered out into the night. The bright bodyguard formed about them. Arms linked, singing of the nuts and may they went to gather, the citizens of the outpost set forth on their adventure. They gave no thought to it, to the prospect of toil, fever, disillusionment and death, no thought to Evan Jones and his disciple. M. Cuvelier forgot to look up at the house on the hill which slept in darkness.

Their song came back across the water and broke

off as they approached the brig. Mat Bradley found an unsure way back to Thompson's house. The lanterns vanished. Quiet descended again. The lights of Li-Goon's went out. Wilhelminastraat was obliterated. The single bright star on the brig was the only sign of man's presence. All about the silent ranges loomed. The dark hours of the night flowed by, uncounted, unseen.

Dawn came into the East. The sky was touched with silver which warmed to rose. Birds awoke and chattered. The blind, dead houses looked out across the bay. Mist drifted whitely from the jungle. Dogs slunk out and stretched themselves, front and hind paws far apart, bellies rubbing the dust. Natives appeared yawning and scratching. They crossed the beach and squatted at the water's edge rinsing their mouths and splashing their faces. The light was still pale and thin. About the ramshackle house which stood apart at the end of Wilhelminastraat activity developed. Dark-skinned men—Hebraic of feature, sturdy, nude—came and went. They were strangers in Netherlandia and were watched with disfavour. In big bundles on their heads they carried all Evan Jones's worldly goods, and the house they left was no more than a shell of palm leaves. A procession formed up and moved off. Analoolie, whose name was John, led it. He wore only a loin cloth. His thin face was lit with ecstasy. He bore on high a crude cross fashioned from two sticks. As he strode along he did not deign to glance at the staring savages. Evan Jones followed, his head bowed down in thought, his face calm and peaceful, the cockatoo, Emmanuel, on his shoulder, raising and lowering its

scarlet crest, flapping its black wings till the flame-coloured undersides showed, and blinking its cunning eyes.

Seen only by brown men—whose looks betrayed the interest and fear of children in the presence of the inexplicable—they passed some distance along Wilhelminastraat. Analoolie raised a nasal, plaintive voice in his own version of a hymn. His train took up the air, singing strange seconds as the impulse moved them. He turned off up a narrow path, still holding his cross on high. Evan Jones followed. The cockatoo screamed. The brown bare back of the last Lost Tribesman was seen in the narrow opening. The jungle closed. For a little time Analoolie's voice came back thinner and thinner. It died away, and ceased at some unnoticed moment. They had gone as completely as if he had led them down the beach, through the shallows and out beneath the sea.

Later the settlement and the brig awoke to another day.

CHAPTER XVI

The wind blew steadily, crowding the bay with little waves. Out in the entrance the rollers raised their walls, dwindling and subsiding as they reached an invisible line drawn between the two headlands. The quiet of mid-afternoon lay on Netherlandia, but the square white block of the *Hirondelle's* sails had no sooner appeared against the blue beyond the easterly point than the outpost awoke. The drum at Hakadada throbbed. Brown figures appeared and scampered to the beach where they stood looking out across the bay, chattering and gesticulating. Only a week had elapsed since the brig's departure, and her unexpected return caused a sensation. Canoes were launched. Mat Bradley, disturbed from his siesta, emerged from Thompson's house. In pyjamas, topee and unlaced boots he looked like a somnambulist, an effect heightened by the smartness of Pedro, who was a study in chocolate brown—suit, shirt, tie, collar, handkerchief, socks and shoes all toning into an over-perfect colour scheme. Together they went down Wilhelminastraat to the jetty, Mat Bradley marching before.

The brig's visit suggested that of a gull. She flitted in, circled, came up into the wind, checked for a few moments, spread her wings again and beat back to sea. The canoes which had clustered about her like a patch of driftwood dispersed and returned towards the beach. In one of them sat a white-clad man. For the natives the excitement was over, but Bradley walked back to the shore and waited there, his gaze

fixed contemptuously on the figure hunched up in the stern of the unsteady hollowed log.

M. Cuvelier did not look up. He studied his feet as if he found there a subject for deep thought. Only when the bow touched the sand and the boys leapt out did he raise his head and wave a salute. His manner was nonchalant, but just failed to convince.

"Good-day! Good-day!" he called, approaching with a gay smile.

"You've come back, have you?" mocked Mat Bradley.

The lack of welcome in this greeting did not help M. Cuvelier to suggest that there was nothing unusual in the return of one of Netherlandia's citizens. He had to recognise that the subterfuge had been penetrated, that the ring-master was displeased with his behaviour. There was scorn in the crack of the whip.

"It would seem so," said M. Cuvelier, taking refuge behind a tartness of manner.

"And what in hell for?" But he knew well enough; this was merely a rebuke.

Pedro's teeth flashed in their neat gold frames. His smile was one of simple amusement.

M. Cuvelier turned away and gave orders about his belongings which had followed in other canoes. He spoke with an emphasis unusual to him, for he managed his boys well and had no cause to bully them. That done, he was compelled to resume the conversation while they strolled along Wilhelmina-straat.

"It might be my business why I 'ave returned," he said, with the same sharpness. But his own sense of

guilt was too strong and Bradley's disapproval too well founded. He abandoned the attempt to adopt a high-handed manner and reverted to affability, the sun of his good humour shining through the clouds with a false brightness. "The truth, Mat, it is that this oil business is the waste of time, the nonsense. Oil?—bah!—all they will get is the fever. I thought better of it. Cap'n Whelan offered to drop me 'ere on 'is run up the coast and I was glad enough to come." He looked with kindly interest at his friend. "Well, and 'ow 'ave things been with you, Mat?" But he could not quite catch his effervescent note.

"Quiet—damn quiet!" said Bradley, unresponsively.

"You then 'ave found it dull 'ere with the Pedro and the Evan Jones?"

"I been right enough. Anyway, Evan Jones isn't here."

"Not 'ere?—then where is 'e?"

"Search me—I'm not his manager. The boys have some yarn about him going away the morning you left. I don't know—I've not worried about it—their 'pidgin' lingo gets my goat. I guess he's gone inland some place."

"So?" The news awakened dim and troublesome echoes. "There is some recollection of that night before we sailed—! 'E addressed us—did 'e not? 'E talked at us, yes?"

They had reached Thompson's house.

"That's so. Spouted a lot of holy stuff. Can't say I'm any too clear about it either." The memory of sufferings was so keen that he had to relent a little. "Sacred Jerusalem, Cuvelier," he exclaimed, "but I

had a head on me and a mouth like a drain!"

"And mine!—ah, I sympathise with you!"

Bradley repented his lapse.

"Well, I don't know what you want to do," he said, his eyes denying the words, "but I'm going to finish my nap. Breeze and all, Netherlandia's no place to be awake in the afternoon."

He nodded briefly and went in, one who knew his own mind and had no patience with the weak. Pedro followed on light feet. M. Cuvelier experienced a passing pang of envy. How fortunate was that Pedro who had only to fight men! He walked on alone, unhappily. The reception had distressed him, making him feel more keenly that his return was humiliating and lamentable. Not to have gone would have been bad, but to have gone only to sneak back was worse. He could not quarrel with Mat Bradley's judgment, for it merely confirmed what he himself felt.

There was no sleep for M. Cuvelier. He paced the veranda in a miserable state of blended despondency and excitement, his gaze ever returning to the house on the hill while he shook his head dubiously and bit his lip. Defeat had played havoc with his nerves. He muttered as he tramped about. Presently he went in and bathed and changed, but his moody abstraction persisted, so that he cursed without spirit when he tried to force his foot into the wrong boot and buttoned his coat unevenly.

The sun was still high but he began the ascent, his restlessness brooking no further delay. The climb did nothing to soothe him, for, in addition to the exertion, the wind set the leaves rustling and whispering and light and shade were unsteady, giving

a sense of agitation. He tried to grapple with the purpose of his mission, but it remained an enigma and grew more puzzling with every step he took. That which had seemed so certain on the deck of the *Hirondelle* now appeared as a hazardous and foolhardy enterprise. His confidence—which he had built up so carefully—ebbed steadily away to vanish completely when he came out on the windy summit and took the path to the front of the silent house. He was haunted by the memory of the splendid gesture of his exit. Here, a mere week later, he returned without excuse! His heart might try to sing at the thought that in a moment he would see Marie again, but he remained tormented by doubts and regrets.

On the veranda he paused, irresolute. The place was not designed for such a visit; there was no bell to ring, he did not wish to shout. With a sense of being neither inside the house nor out, he shuffled and coughed. Silence. He wiped his face. This arrival had been imagined only as seconds of rapture while Marie floated into his arms; the practical details had been overlooked. He felt inclined to run away. While he hesitated Marie appeared and advanced to meet him. In a flash M. Cuvelier realised that she was a stranger to the scene he had rehearsed so often. Her poise, her firmness, the neat solidity of her body, her impenetrable reserve—he had forgotten all these. There was to be no swift and magical mingling of souls! He was left without a cue, astounded at his own stupid simplicity.

"Well, Paul——?" she said, greeting an expected caller.

"Marie——!" His voice was husky. There was so

much to be said that no words came to him, but taking her hand he looked at it as if he had not expected to find it made of cool flesh. "You are not surprised——?" he began at last, in French, crestfallen.

"Surprised? But no——!" What was there to surprise her?

"You saw me, then, land from the *Hirondelle*?" he asked, urging this as the explanation of her calm.

But her head moved slightly in denial.

"No, I knew you would came back."

The tribute of weakness and failure which he had been compelled to bring was accepted as a foregone conclusion. His discomfort increased. He had deluded himself. There was not even the merit of a willing surrender in his return—he had been forced into it, inevitably. He could only look into her eyes in a puzzled way, mocked by the image of himself prisoned there.

"He is out?" he asked, helplessly, realising that he had only been able to prepare for a meeting with a woman and not a meeting with Marie.

"Louis? Yes, somewhere about the plantation." She could not have spoken more casually had he been her husband's friend.

"Thank God!—for I must talk with you. It cannot wait! This is desperate——!" Embraces, kisses, passionate declarations were to have followed hot on that, but instead M. Cuvelier released her hand and moved away like one about to begin a normal conversation. Yet tumult was in his blood.

"Yes?" she invited, quite interested but quite aloof.

Crossing to a chair she lifted it around and sat

down sideways upon the extension. M. Cuvelier leaned back against the rail, clutching it. Vines whispered in his ears, and the loud voices of the palms came to him. Her frock was stirred by the breeze. She sat in its whiteness, disassociated from the movement, her hands open and idle on her lap, her face still, her body in repose. He feasted hungry eyes upon her, but the resolution to take her by storm had gone. He could not do it. Why, he thought bitterly, could she quell and control him like this, make him gauche and impotent, rob him of all the fruits of experience? There was no bitterness against her in the complaint. It was directed solely against himself. She was the more wonderful for the power; he the more humbled. There she sat clad in baffling simplicity and quiet—Marie, the child, grown to taller stature.

"The truth is that I have never gone away," he burst out. "My body sailed off in the *Hirondelle*, yes!—but my heart and my soul have never left this place. They never shall while you are here. You understand me?"

"Yes," she said, evenly.

He locked his hands and stretched them down and out to her.

"Think of what it was to me. It has been torture. I have been in hell. You know that I do not love you with man's ordinary love for women—you know that to me you stand for sacred things, for all that is divine in life. Think, then, what it was to be going away from you—to feel with every plunge of that ship I left you further behind. Think of me on her deck! . . . It is starlight; I am alone—the empty

sea all around. I look back along the gleam of the wake to where I know Netherlandia is. The ship's bell is struck. I count the strokes. I say: 'It is midnight. They will be in bed now. She will be in his arms alone up there in the house on the hill!' Ah!" He pressed his heart and bent his head, nursing a stab of pain.

She assented with a nod, watching him the while.

"Yes, at twelve, of course, we should be in bed. As for his arms—yes, I suppose that is natural and probable, also." His reasonable supposition was accepted, and she waited for him to go on.

A choking sob escaped M. Cuvelier.

"Ah, my God, it is unendurable!" he cried, and starting forward fell on his knees at her feet. His arms encircled her legs and pressed them to his breast, his head was bowed, he knelt in silence, a supplicant, an idolator. For a time he remained so and then raising a pale, strained face pleaded his cause in a whisper. "Marie, you know I cannot bear it. The thought drives me mad! I cannot stay sane with it in my brain like a hot knife. Anyone but you! . . . I cannot bear it! You must come away with me. I do not ask as a lover. This is different, greater, finer! You must come away. We have found each other again by the grace of the good God. It is a miracle. We shall go away—anywhere! Only to be together—the bliss! . . . the rapture! . . . You *must!* Only say it!—only say it! Marie! Marie!

He laid his head on her knees like a tired child, and his shoulders quivered.

"Hush, Paul!" she said gently, and then: "My dear, you have taken too many things for granted.

The English have a saying"—she lapsed into English—" 'He rushes his hurdles! . . .' "

The change of language—the prosaic phrase—struck like a blow. He fell back on his heels eyes misty with dismay. The cruelty of the words was heightened by their suggestion of a comparison between national outlooks. He had an incredible sensation of being weighed against Louis Kingsclere in nicely adjusted and impartial scales—scales of weights and springs without a heart. But that was driven out instantly by a sudden flooding realisation of her serene beauty and his desperate need.

"But," he protested, " you do not care for him. I have known that all along. He does not mean to you what I mean."

"He is my husband," she reminded him, gazing down into his face.

"But yes, he is your husband." To be forced even to that admission hurt. "It means—what? I am your playfellow—your sweetheart—your mate. I am your natural complement—you mine."

"And I, then, am necessary to your happiness?"

M. Cuvelier quickened to this hint of hope.

"Assuredly!—as necessary as the sun. Without you there can never be happiness for me now. I cannot live without you. And does he love you like that? What is he?—he is so dull, so cold—he—"

"How do you know what he is?" There was no malice in her tone, only sweetest interest, and yet M. Cuvelier's picture of Kingsclere stood discounted and denied. He saw that the image he had built up might be as far from the truth as that he had made of Marie. Confused but painfully vivid shadows took

its place. They showed a Louis Kingsclere who was not a clod but who held Marie with unknown charms.

He unlocked his arms and stood up, abashed and chilled. The slender foundations of his castle of fancy trembled. The seeming realities his desires had created might be all illusions! Loving he had assumed love; seeing Kingsclere as a clod he had assumed that the man was a clod to her eyes. His hands fumbled, thrusting away the fears which beset him. Could it be, then, that he, Paul Cuvelier, was the dullard and the fool?

"But Marie——?" He broke off and drew a long breath before he could express that which he dreaded. "You say you love this man and do not love me?" The question was spoken slowly, each word an effort.

"Did I say that?"

M. Cuvelier's hands fluttered vaguely as if he sought to escape from bonds light as gossamer yet strong as steel. Effortlessly, seemingly without intention, she evaded him, foiled him, bewildered him. There was something to be done—some course to take which would lead to success—but he just failed to find it, and could only rage at his own incompetence. He tried to shut his ears to the sound of the footsteps on the garden-path, but could do so no longer. They signalled that it was too late. The opportunity had passed. He had failed in his return even as he had failed in his attempt to escape.

"Yes," said Leila, "that is Louis."

She was not relieved; she was not chagrined. With a leisurely movement she settled back into the chair, clasping her hands behind her head, withdrawing further into herself to observe what might follow.

M. Cuvelier retreated to the rail and waited numbly.

"Ah——!" breathed Kingsclere as he stepped in—the sigh of a hot and tired man glad to have come home at evening to his beloved and refreshment and ease. He was in khaki "shorts" and a khaki shirt the sleeves of which were cut off above the elbows, and he looked tanned and healthy, a cultivator, a friend of growing things rooted in the soil. For a second his eyes were blinded by the shadow there after the brightness of the sunshine, and then he saw M. Cuvelier standing stiffly against the background of flowery vines. Halting in the middle of a step he stared in an incredulous way, his mouth open, as if he believed the figure to be no more than the creation of morbid fancy. And M. Cuvelier, in failure, looked much more guilty than he would have done in success.

"Cuvelier——?"

Each syllable was accented sharply.

"*Oui, monsieur——!*" The admission—for it was an admission—was made with a formal bow. "Yes, Kingsclere—as you see I 'ave come back," he went on hastily in an attempt to cover an error.

They faced each other, striving to preserve the decencies, like enemies meeting in the decorous ritual of a duel—the husband whose hatred sprang from his own secret knowledge that he was only the shadow of a man; the lover whose contempt for his rival made his contempt for himself the stronger. Leila's domination robbed them of the outlet of physical action and confined their conflict to the mental and spiritual, so that a spectacle was provided which called for no protest but, in its subtle bitterness, must have

been more savage and exciting to an acute spectator than any crude exchange of curses and blows.

"Why have you come back?" Kingsclere demanded, indignantly. "We said 'good-bye' to you—why have you come back?"

They were both remembering the relief of that parting. M. Cuvelier shrugged his shoulders. His composure was thin, cold and brittle, like ice.

"The oil 'unt was the folly. I was wise to leave it to the fools!" The sentence was ended, but, surprisingly, out of his own thoughts and against his intention, he added to it: "—I think!" The qualification could not pretend to have anything to do with the expedition's prospects of finding oil.

They were grimly still and silent.

The situation might have been contrived by an artist working with exquisite ingenuity and patience. As a combination of enmity, suffering and mystification it was a complete success and could only have been achieved by the careful and farsighted preparation of the pigments of their lives and souls. These foes had not exchanged one angry word and on the surface had made no more than the casual contacts of acquaintances. Yet their passionate reactions went down into the roots of their beings. And the savage drollery of their position! Kingsclere, as a sane man, could not drive M. Cuvelier from his house, for what had M. Cuvelier done to him?—It was no crime to have been Leila's friend as a child. Cuvelier, an equally sane man, had no possible claim on Kingsclere's wife nor did he even know her feelings. They were held in bondage by circumstances and the secrets of their hearts. They could love and

hate and suffer, but had no escape from bondage until the artist's hand took up the brush and completed the composition with sure strokes, to this end or that.

Leila—a faithful wife who had gently checked a romantic attachment—was able to watch both men without moving her beautiful head. No apprehension showed in her clear, deep eyes. She meditated on the antagonism which existed between them, saw how powerless they were, and when, at last, they turned to her, appealing for her aid, she thanked each with the shadow of a smile for his admirable restraint and solaced them with her approval. For a breath she remained so—imperturbable, wise, Mona Lisa—and then she stirred and spoke in a brisk, everyday manner.

"Tea's ready, Lulu. I kept it, though you were late. You'd better have it before you bathe. Or would you rather whisky——? M. Cuvelier——?" She might have noticed nothing; there might not have been anything to notice.

They blinked, startled by this complete and sudden anti-climax. Collapse brought with it a sensation of having made themselves ridiculous by becoming prey to such intense emotion. Nothing was settled—their antipathies were merely wrapped about in the commonplace—but at least a truce had been granted and they were grateful to her for it and admired her the more. Leila maintained the note with easy grace. She was active in her duties as hostess. The ritual of tea helped the return to normal. Boys came and went. There was the table to be moved and chairs to be arranged. M. Cuvelier assisted with the cups;

Kingsclere rebuked a boy for clumsiness. They found occupation and relief. Tongues and minds were eased by questions of how much sugar and whether lime or milk would be taken; a choice had to be made between biscuits, cakes or sandwiches. Leila recommended the cakes. She had supervised their making. M. Cuvelier admitted that, although sweet trifles were usually not to his liking, he could not resist these. In speech the men concentrated on such things; in thoughts they prayed that this blessed respite might be prolonged sufficiently for them to decide what was to be done, what they really hoped and what they really feared.

"Oh, M. Cuvelier," said Leila casually, "I keep forgetting to tell you: we've a hat of yours here. You left it behind one evening."

M. Cuvelier murmured his thanks and selected another cake to hide his confusion. Kingsclere also moved uneasily. So unstable, so precarious, was their truce that even the mention of a hat was enough to shake it! But before the embarrassment could settle on them a diversion was provided by footsteps on the path. Callers in Netherlandia who wore boots were white.

"Must be Bradley!" Kingsclere exclaimed.

"Ah, yes!"

They were well pleased. A hearty welcome awaited Mat Bradley.

But instead of his heavy figure they turned to see a sandy-haired, small man who panted after the climb. He paused nervously and taking off his gold-rimmed spectacles polished them busily, his face looking oddly nude without them.

"Ahem!" he coughed, craning forward and peering in a lost way with eyes of watery blue.

"My dear padre!" cried M. Cuvelier warmly, and, though usually no friend to missionaries, hurried to the stranger and snatched his hand.

"Ah, is that you, M. Cuvelier?" He re-clad his face and satisfied himself that it was. "I am glad to have found you. I saw the *Hirondelle* arrive, and hoped some of you might have returned. This is, indeed, providential! They told me at Li-Goon's I'd find you up here. It is——" He checked, discovering the others. "I must apologise for this intrusion——!"

But he was the most opportune of callers.

"Pardon! I 'ad forgotten. Per'aps you 'ave not met the padre. This is the Rev. Agnew from the mission station across in British territory."

Introductions were performed. Through the missionary's nervousness trouble showed, but he accepted tea with mechanical phrases and balanced the cup on a clerically-dexterous knee.

"There is something wrong, padre. Per'aps you would soothe your mind by telling to us what it is that is wrong? For what did you wish to see me?"

Agnew was very ready to come to the reason for his visit. He grew serious, shook his head from side to side, pouted his lower lip.

"I want your help, Cuvelier, and—if I may ask it so soon—yours, Mr. Kingsclere. A very peculiar and unfortunate affair has arisen which must be put right as soon as possible. It is in connection with the trader, Evan Jones. I suppose you know that he has left Netherlandia?"

"And where 'as 'e gone—that poor little man?"

"He went away with the native Analoolie who came back from the Jesuit missionaries recently. They are at Analoolie's village, some four days' journey inland."

M. Cuvelier made a sharp clicking noise with his tongue. "I 'ave known it all along that they were up to no good, those two," he declared. "Your religion, monsieur, was too much for the minds of those two."

"Not quite my religion," the other expostulated mildly.

"I 'ave known it! I 'ave known they were not 'right' up 'ere"—as always when making this announcement he tapped his brow—"and that together they would do each other the 'arm. On the night before we sailed I was for sending the Analoolie away, but—" he made a wry grimace—"there was so much to do——!"

"It's a great pity you didn't act. I have my information from my boys who have heard it through their mysterious bush wireless. You know how involved and exaggerated such reports become, but I fear this is a very sorry business. It seems—according to the gossip—that Analoolie has taken Evan Jones back to his village as the new Messiah. I cannot follow it all, but there seems to be a lot of gibberish about the Lost Tribes connected with it. Analoolie is announcing himself as a new John the Baptist. And the deluded Evan Jones seems to have allowed himself to be led into the madness. There are the strangest stories about. Even at my place the boys are in a ferment. Evan Jones is declared to be giving away all his possessions, to be working miracles, to be talking with

birds, beasts and fishes—all kinds of impossibilities, but you know what children these people are. The village, by all reports, is in a state of false religious intoxication. It is all very hideous! Evan Jones preaches to them, and Analoolie translates the harangues as the very word of God. You know Analoolie. He is an extraordinary type. I only wish he had come to me. Properly guided he might have been a great power for right. I do not blame the Jesuits, of course—they, in their way, are worthy if narrow men—but I cannot help feeling that they have not appreciated his unusual personality. A most unhappy business—altogether most unhappy!" He polished his glasses, and before putting them on again dabbed at the corners of his eyes with his handkerchief.

"The poor Evan Jones," mourned M. Cuvelier. "Ah, this religion!—what a curse!—what a curse!"

Agnew bristled. The effect was peculiarly like a display of anger by a rabbit.

"You forget, monsieur, that the trouble is not religion, but insanity. They are not holy men; they are mad men."

"Pardon! Pardon!" M. Cuvelier implored, politely.

The missionary brushed his sharpness away as something inimical to his purpose.

"The point is that this cannot be allowed to go on. There is the peril to the unfortunate man; the whole thing is blasphemous and terrible; it is bad for the prestige of every white in the island. The white man's religion is made a mockery—and who knows what

the consequences may be? These excitable children may be led to anything!"

"So," M. Cuvelier agreed, weighing the position. "It will not do!"

The missionary put his cup on the floor and leaned towards them with greater earnestness.

"I am glad to hear you say that, for there is nobody here to call upon save yourselves—even the new port officer in van Rossen's place having been delayed. I am no longer young, and, I am sorry to say, my years have enfeebled me. That is why I have come to you. Only one course is open to you—you must go and bring this man back. I shall make myself responsible for him then and see that he is placed where he will be comfortable and out of mischief. It is a dangerous and arduous mission, but I appeal to you in the name of God and humanity! It is your duty for your own sakes, for the sake of a luckless fellow-creature, for the sake of the decencies of civilization. Surely you will save this miserable man? Surely you will go? Come, M. Cuvelier! Come, Mr. Kingsclere!—I appeal to you in the name of God and humanity! . . ."

He held out his thin, freckled hands, his tired mouth trembled, and his eyes were moist and eager. The harsh vibrations of his voice died away. There was only the shout of the wind, and the mutter of the sea. He awaited their answer, a stranger to the secrets of that veranda.

At his appeal, at his suggestion of such a pilgrimage, M. Cuvelier and Louis Kingsclere had bowed their heads suddenly and continued to watch the boards, like men ashamed of what was to be read in their eyes. They made no answer. To the missionary

they hesitated, afraid or unwilling to go to the rescue of Evan Jones.

"You cannot think of refusing," he protested sadly.

The men did not heed. They had forgotten him. When their eyes were raised it was to consult their oracle. They looked at Leila.

She showed no alarm—a woman of courage, Agnew recognised—but there was a fascinated quality in the regard with which she considered them. She seemed to look with awed interest through the masks of their faces into their souls. Then, turning her head slowly, she gazed beyond them along the veranda and towards the ranges. Uneasily their eyes followed hers.

The empty wilderness was there, hidden and secretive beneath its swaying, restless coverlet of jungle. The hills grew higher and receded—fold upon fold—their green fading to palest blue. They rose up and up into the sky until it seemed that behind the final ridge—where the trees stood out in silhouette like teeth—must be the rim of the earth. Over the whole great sweep brooded a spirit of cruelty and threat. It seemed impossible that men—frail, tiny, mortal—could ever find a way through those hidden and illimitable solitudes. It was obvious that men attempting to do so would enter into a stark and barbarous world.

They looked away abruptly. Leila's glance caught and held M. Cuvelier's for an instant.

"I will go," he said with a snap, like one taking up a challenge. "And you, monsieur?—dare you go?"

"Good!" the missionary interposed, but he saw that Kingsclere still struggled against a shameful

temptation. Agnew hoped he would conquer it for his own sake. The man's eyes turned to his wife, imploring her assistance to overcome his weakness.

Agnew rejoiced to see her nod assent with a serene smile.

"I shall be all right," she said.

"If you wish my wife would be delighted to have you come over and stay at the mission," he hastened to assure her.

"You are very kind!"

Kingsclere arrived at a decision.

"If you go, I go!" he said.

The missionary believed he caught an inexplicable flash of bitterness and rivalry between the two men, but knew that this could be no more than a trick of imagination.

"That 'as settled it," M. Cuvelier remarked, resigned and philosophical. "We must leave at dawn, and there is much to do. This rescue of the Evan Jones is a mission strange and dangerous. We must go upon it prepared for trouble."

"Yes," Kingsclere agreed, almost reluctantly, "for trouble——!"

"God bless and preserve you both, and my thanks to you, Mrs. Kingsclere," said the little missionary. He took off his glasses and cleaned them, peering at the gracious lady and the gallant fellows with short-sighted eyes.

BOOK FOUR
PILGRIMAGE

CHAPTER XVII

With the waning of day the air cooled and the jungle awakened. Paradise birds gave their sharp whistling notes, cockatoos screamed, parrots flashed from tree to tree, chattering, the shrill songs of insects arose and the first stirrings of a breeze moved among the leaves. Even the voice of the stream sounded louder and clearer. After the numbed hiatus of the heat this resumption of life struck a gossiping and sociable note, so that all nature seemed to relax and rejoice at being freed from the tyranny of the sun. But the two white men—slaves to a more cruel tyranny—remained grim and silent.

They marched at the head of the straggling line of bearers along the bed of a water-course—a rough and fatiguing path through walls of vegetation which hemmed them in on every side and, meeting above, shut out the sky. Great vines welded trees, palms and shrubs into a mass of dark green splashed here and there with lighter leaves so fresh and delicate that they looked ephemeral, like spray. The stream wound a tortuous way through the wilderness, now climbing diagonally along upward slopes, now falling precipitately down into valleys. The stones cut through their heavy boots; the jungle lashed at them. They stubbornly plodded on.

Netherlandia, which they had left that morning, already seemed far off in time and distance. Save for the unheeded shadows at their heels they were alone in a primeval environment of quick growth

and quick decay, of eager life in perpetual conflict with death. There were no distractions, no restrictions, no sobering influences. They were free to brood, encouraged to brood, on their own dark fancies. The laws of men did not rule, nor did the eyes of man see. Buried in those green depths they were hidden, it seemed, even from the eyes of God.

Through the long hours Louis Kingsclere had watched the man ahead of him until M. Cuvelier had become a hateful automaton which stalked along on scissor legs, now the right foot forward now the left, steadily, regularly, an inhuman thing driven by wheels and springs. Left leg forward, right arm forward; right leg forward, left arm forward—but did it know to what its legs carried it? Did it realise that anything might happen? Undoubtedly!—otherwise why was its glib tongue so silent, its mood so sombre? There was a great black patch of sweat on the khaki of its shirt between the shoulder blades. The patch looked like a shield slung there as a guard against a thrust from behind. Well, anything might happen! The words beat in his head, setting the time to which he marched. Anything might happen! Anything might happen!

The thought of Leila returned again. He remembered her in her hours of tranquil loveliness and her moments of warm abandon. They had been so happy together until Cuvelier had arisen from the grave to haunt them. Little incidents recurred to him, brightly and vividly, painting a picture so real that he felt as if he held her in his arms. If only Cuvelier had slept on in his grave! No wonder he looked like a mechanical figure, for, properly, he was

a dead man, dead in the past. When Cuvelier had been sent back to his grave—anything might happen! —he would return to Leila and all would be as it had been. The deep river of their days would flow on.

Again—for his thoughts moved in a well-worn circle—he wondered if she had guessed all that was involved in their expedition. It was almost incredible that she had, and yet, recalling the deliberate inclination of her head which had bidden him go, he could fancy that she had read the temptation which had sprung up in his mind, and approved it. She knew he hated Cuvelier; she must have recognised what an opportunity would be provided alone with him in these green and secret places. If so and she still sent him, his wish and hers ran side by side. But he could not be certain. Perhaps she cherished the hope they would become friends. That was out of the question. Their struggle had to be fought out. He abandoned the hopeless inquiry into Leila's motives and returned to the point at which he meditated, between horror and exultation, on what might happen and what plans and mischief were taking shape in the brain of his hated and hating companion. His blood hurried. There was no fear in him. He was a match for Cuvelier and would vanquish him. Success had always been Louis Kingsclere's portion; it would be his again in this testing on which all depended.

The breeze grew stronger, speaking with an unimaginable multitude of leafy tongues. The light softened. They had reached the top of a sharp ascent and halted to regain breath, the white men

still dumb and facing on towards their distant goal. Though they stood upon a height there was no view, for the jungle still shut them in. The bearers, crouching on their haunches, chattered together, but despite the noise of leaves, birds and insects the sounds of the guttural voices seemed to be swallowed in an immensity of silence.

Kingsclere, aching, moved his toes about in his soaked boots.

What followed was outside the measurement of human thought or time, like a flash of lightning.

As M. Cuvelier paused his shoulder had disturbed an overhanging bough. A movement there caught Kingsclere's attention. He saw a yellow-striped snake reared to strike. Its flat head was poised, aiming for the back of the Frenchman's neck. He stood at ease, resting his weight on one foot, all unaware of death's impending stroke. Paralysis gripped Kingsclere; M. Cuvelier was still; the snake gathered itself among the trembling leaves. In that fraction of a breath every instinct of loathing aroused by a serpent in a son of Adam swept up in Kingsclere. Nothing else existed in him. Yet he could not cry out nor move. It seemed to him that for an age he waited in a hell of helplessness for the attack to continue. In reality, his eye had no sooner seen than his bare hand shot out in a chopping blow.

For another age his flesh rested against the scaly skin, and he was braced to receive the death deflected from the motionless man. Bleak dread ran in his veins.

Then something had snapped in his head, and he was sitting weakly on a boulder in the stream. The boys were capering and jabbering. The snake had

gone. He retained an impression of it dropping from the branch and darting with sinuous grace across the rocks and into the jungle on the further side—quick, quivering, like a shifting beam of light. M. Cuvelier, olive skin very pale, gazed down at him with starting eyes. There was a dew on his foe's brow, and his mouth, beneath the bar of moustache, was wide open in a soundless oath.

Kingsclere fought against physical nausea. He felt exhausted; he could have laughed or cried. But he was ashamed of his condition. He did not want Cuvelier to have the chance of gloating on him while he was like that.

"I'm—I'm sorry——!" he apologised in a dazed way. "Yes, sorry——! Didn't know I was so afraid of a snake. Surprising——!"

He held his head in his hands, elbows resting on knees.

"Monsieur, you 'ave saved my life——!"

M. Cuvelier spoke in a hushed tone, which expressed astonishment rather than gratitude, awe rather than relief. He pushed his topee back, and stood with hands on hips staring down at the other in bewilderment.

"I know!"

"You 'ave the bravery! Oh, you 'ave the bravery, but——!"

M. Cuvelier broke off, completely at a loss. His hands moved, asking the question his lips could not shape. Kingsclere without seeing the gesture knew what was in the Frenchman's mind.

"I did it—just on the spur of the moment, you know," he explained, almost sheepishly.

"And you 'ave saved my life! That was a tiger snake, monsieur—fatal! What can one say which is enough——?"

M. Cuvelier's puckered brow expressed the quandary in which he was placed, but the chagrin he experienced arose from something deeper than the mere inability to voice his thanks. Anger was in his eyes, as if the crouching man had played an unfair trick upon him. The rescued could not have been less gracious.

And Kingsclere was realising the folly, the insanity of his act. Death had struck at his enemy, but, in a moment of sheer madness he had rejected the service, had deliberately risked his own life to save that of the man he longed to destroy. He looked down into the hurrying water with blacker dismay and blacker hatred than ever in his heart. What a thing to do! What a thing to do! He could have wailed aloud; he could have rocked from side to side in the bitterness of his regret. But he sat on the boulder like a figure of stone, and watched the water rushing over his boots. The rescuer could not have been less gracious.

The delighted babble of the bearers went on; the white men were silent, dwelling in separate worlds of isolation in the isolated world of the ranges. The unwilling debtor and the unwilling creditor considered their new positions.

The threat of death had come so suddenly and been so instantaneously removed that it had not made a deep impression on M. Cuvelier, but the obligation which he now owed to Marie's husband remained as a tangible and irritating fact. He was forced back again and again to it. A dead man could neither hate

nor do murder. The dull clod had dexterously turned the tables on him. He was trapped and powerless, and swore fiercely but silently.

The difficulty! . . . The awkwardness! . . . He tried to bring himself to say more, to be honest in gratitude, to take the hand which had saved, but he could not. The thought of Marie up there on the height in the clod's arms came back stingingly. That was not changed; that was not settled. And he saw that Kingsclere mourned.

"He is agonised by the thought that without his interference I should be dead at this moment!" mused M. Cuvelier, and the sardonic humour of that helped him to collect his faculties.

"Come, monsieur," he said, in a tone which almost admitted that they might as well drop pretence. "The light fades. We 'ave still some distance to go. Can you proceed?"

"Yes," Kingsclere agreed, welcoming the suggestion and the manner in which it was made. "Oh, yes! I'm quite all right. It was only just touching the beastly thing. I was pretty done-up after the long climb, and it got me in the stomach as it were." He sought to appear normal and casual.

"So! I appreciate the feelings that you 'ave. I, too, 'ave the fear of snakes. It was, as you would say, 'the close shave.' We are fortunate." He paused. "I am deeply in your debt, monsieur," he concluded, closing the matter with a bow, but in secret he was exclaiming: Droll! Droll!

"Not at all!" said Kingsclere, mechanically.

They avoided each other's eyes. The light was golden and thin. About them the leaves rustled and

swayed. A hush was descending on the birds.

"Well——!" said M. Cuvelier.

He jerked his shoulders, like one taking up a burden again, and led on. Kingsclere tramped behind. The boys fell into single file. The little band resumed their mission of mercy, journeying through a world growing more shadowy and misty with every moment. But neither the deliverance from death, nor their charitable objective could make the leaders cleave together. Dividing them, with the cool blue flame of a sword, was the memory of Leila.

Somewhere the sun had set. Day ebbed away. Chillness crept into the air, and the moist, hot earth gave off a heavy breath. A suggestion of new life aroused by the coming of night stole out of the dark tangle. Their intruding feet set unseen creatures scuttling away. Weariness pressed on them—a weariness of mind, soul and body. It was difficult to see the way now. They slipped and stumbled. A smell of wood-smoke reached their nostrils, refreshing them with the promise of rest. M. Cuvelier quickened his steps, and the string of figures behind did the same, as if chained to him. They heard the barking of dogs. Ahead, like a beacon, a fire winked.

And then, as a swimmer does after a deep dive, they returned to the sky and the world, emerging into a clearing in which was a village of a dozen huts. They expanded their lungs, revelling in the sense of liberty. Stars were coming out. The hills rose in dark masses. Against the silver-blue the crest of the jungle showed, swaying and restless, like a wave on the point of crashing down in a black smother to wipe

out this tiny haven created by men in the heart of its sea.

Starved curs ran out and yelped. Long, razor-backed hogs lifted their snouts and grunted. The naked people squatting about the fires raised their heads and looked over thin knees with expressions sullen, watchful and yet disinterested. They were not excited by the arrival of the rare visitors; they accepted them with reservations. If these incomprehensible white men only wished to sleep and would do no harm—if they were armed and guarded and could not be harmed—there was an end to the interest. Gifts of trade tobacco and trinkets would be distributed, but although greedy for such gifts they did not bestir themselves. There was no need. The white men were rich, and would pay what they wished; nothing would make them pay more. Squatting there, hairy and dark and silent, the villagers had the appearance of the larger apes—the same note of shrewd wisdom and resignation, the same blend of the animal and the human.

M. Cuvelier gave orders, and talked with the headman, an ancient skeleton in a wrinkled and worn bag of skin. The women were set to work preparing huts. Sticks of black tobacco were snatched with the careless and thankless eagerness of apes. The bearers stacked their burdens. The evening meal appeared from tins. Having washed and cleaned in a perfunctory manner, the white men rested on logs on opposite sides of a fire. They had no conversation, nor did they look at each other. They stared into the flames, seeing strange pictures. Sometimes their heads nodded. Even when the roughly served food

was set before them they did not escape from their reveries, but ate slowly and thoughtfully, the fire red between them.

Children with bulging stomachs and eyes round and white, toddled up, and, fingers in mouths, studied them in solemn attention. Pigs snuzzled about, and dogs prowled and snapped. At another fire the bearers talked together, and occasionally broke into song which swept up and died away with the same seeming inconsequence. But soon the shadowy figures began to disappear. The fires were allowed to sink lower. Logs were placed on that at which the white men sat. The huts swallowed the villagers, and the animals went to rest.

M. Cuvelier and Kingsclere were left alone. The stars blazed, and the wave of the jungle still threatened and still checked in the act of breaking. The wind sighed into the clearing, and went on upon its lonely journey. The croaking of frogs and the occasional cry of a bird were the only sounds of life. Wisps of fog formed into strange shapes and were dispelled. The smoke trailed away into the darkness. An unutterable sense of loneliness arose so strongly from the hundreds of miles of sleeping, shrouded, empty land hemmed in by the great sea that it seemed perceptible and substantial, pressing heavily upon the heart.

The fire, collapsing inward upon itself, sent up a burst of sparks which were obliterated by the night. M. Cuvelier stirred. He took out the waterproof tin in which he carried his cheroots, selected one, and lit it. The spurt of the match reminded Kingsclere that his pipe was cold. He remedied that. Exhaling

long plumes of smoke they looked at each other, straightly and carefully, for the first time that day. Their environment had worked on them. For all their reserve, for all their hatred, they were drawn together. Concealment was no longer possible. Man's little artifices seemed futile. They were lifted above such things.

M. Cuvelier looked at the red tip of his cheroot.

"Monsieur," he remarked unemotionally, "you saved *your* life to-day."

"I know that."

"Ah, you know that, eh?" M. Cuvelier raised his eyes and considered the quiet man on the other side of the fire.

Kingsclere nodded. "I saved your life twice over."

Neither showed surprise at these confessions. They seemed eased by them, and leaned forward to discuss the situation dispassionately, as if their problem was that of two other men whom they both knew. The tension which had existed ever since M. Cuvelier's return was broken. They were relieved and pleased. In some contradictory, subconscious way each found in the other an ally as well as a foe.

"You 'ave known, of course, that I love 'er?"

"Yes."

"And you 'ave 'ad the 'atred natural of me?"

"Yes."

"And I, too, 'ave 'ad the 'atred natural of you. Think what it 'as meant to me—the thought of you up there in that 'ouse so 'igh in 'eaven with the woman I loved—but not as men love women—in your arms. Think of that, monsieur, think of that!"

The manner in which he spoke and the manner in which Kingsclere heard robbed the statement of personal application. They discussed, far removed from mankind, a point in human relationships, and M. Cuvelier was quite justified in urging any point of view he chose. Even when Kingsclere answered: "She is my wife," he did not insist on a claim and a right, but merely indicated an aspect of the case which had to be remembered.

"Yes," M. Cuvelier admitted, tugging at his moustache with his squirrel-gesture, "yes, she 'as told me that 'erself. Yes, she 'as told me that. You 'ave some 'old on 'er to me incompre'ensible. I am frank: incompre'ensible." He watched Kingsclere sharply as if hoping to surprise what that hold could be. But Kingsclere merely returned his glance, and was utterly unselfconscious. "Incompre'ensible," M. Cuvelier insisted. "I am not afraid of you as the rival. You are 'er 'usband, yes—but what is that?" He snapped his fingers in airy dismissal. "But there is something about you which I cannot get down into. You are a mystery to me. You are; she is. 'Er I can accept as a mystery—can love as a mystery. But you are a mystery I can only 'ate, and it is not good to 'ate what one cannot understand. Well, there it is: you I 'ate. And then this mission—it comes like the act of the good God. It is the chance, though I am honest when I say that I do not quite know the chance for what. It is the chance to be rid of you, yes, of this I am certain—but 'ow? 'Ow? I did not see myself murdering you in cold blood, and yet——!" He broke off with a shrug, bland and blameless.

"You merely saw," Kingsclere supplemented helpfully, " that anything might happen!"

"But exactly!" cried M. Cuvelier.

"The same thing's been in my mind ever since the first moment that missionary spoke."

"Ah, that missionary!—that blind man! One might laugh at 'im, who saw us only going out to save. Two murderers at heart, my friend, two murderers!"

"And yet—I saved your life to-day!" Kingsclere pointed out, voicing a grievance which rankled.

"And your own——!" came the reminder. "Bah! it is the mad business. I still love 'er—it is still necessary to me that you should be got out of the way—but because that I am the fool I cannot think to kill the man but for whom I should be dead. Bah! —folly!—folly!" He wrung his hands in impotent despair which held an element of cynical amusement.

Kingsclere answered him with the same dry and bitter mirth: "And now I feel a kind of proprietorial interest in you. How can I kill the man I have saved from being killed?" He spoke the truth. The skeleton from the past had become flesh and blood, puzzled and lost among the mysteries of life and human souls—a distorting yet disconcertingly realistic image of himself in love and in hatred. He looked up at the stars, and—remembering that if he had not stretched out his hand, at this moment M. Cuvelier must have been an empty husk and he would have been sitting there alone—was dismayed by the tremendous shadow of that he had planned to invoke.

"Fancy," he said, with twisted lips, "daring to call

in Death to settle anything so trivial as what can happen to you or me!"

M. Cuvelier responded immediately to this. Human pretensions always appealed to his imagination. He had dwelt much in solitude and in strange places where men were dwarfed by their surroundings. Also sex meant much less to M. Cuvelier than he believed, and mental interest and excitement a great deal more. He threw the stump of his cheroot into the ashes and started to his feet.

A wave of sympathy swept over Kingsclere. The Frenchman, so full of vitality and eagerness, seen in that spot of firelight in the dark, against the great hills and beneath the stars, was so tiny and helpless. There was something pitiful about him, something quaintly heroic. To think that at this moment he might have been blotted out as utterly as the least of Cæsar's legionaries!

"Ah, you are right, monsieur. What toys we are! What playthings! What shadows! Consider——!" He threw himself into an heroic attitude, with legs straddled and arms outstretched, inviting mockery and smiling down the while in impudence and defiance. "Regard me and yourself," he swept on, " 'ere are we—worms, maggots! But, mind you, each creating all this magnificent world and night for 'imself, for when our little lamps are snuffed out where is all this for us? It 'as gone! It 'as finished as completely as if the crack of doom 'ad sounded. And 'ere we are then—we gifted maggots—loving the same woman, and imagining that our love is something so big that it is divine and of the importance. We are, as you 'ave said, prepared to call in Death

that we may love. And 'ere in the wilderness Destiny makes us the jest, my friend. There is that little snake in the way—ugh!—as if Destiny 'as said 'I must intervene 'ere for the sake of this important maggot'—meaning you, monsieur. ''E must be allowed to love without being troubled by this other maggot, even though this other maggot'—meaning me, monsieur—'is just as important to 'imself and to me.' And what then? Why, then, with a chuckle, Destiny arranges that your 'and shall be raised against 'er decree in my favour. You save me! But the humorous price I must pay for my deliverance! . . . And the humorous reward of your 'eroism! . . ." He paused, and his teeth flashed in something between a snarl and a smile. "It is too absurd! Beyond me—I give it up!" His collapse expressed the pricking of a bubble of conceit. He resumed his place on the log and wagged his head ruefully at his rival.

"Yes," said Kingsclere. "Yes." He discovered that he was sitting there wagging his head, also, in complete agreement. "And now, on top of everything else, we've been tricked into these confessions. Before we've been gone a day we're forced into an understanding and shall never be able now to clear things up by—as we hoped to. Confound it all, Cuvelier, its damnable!—ludicrous!"

His absurd petulance caused them both to laugh aloud. There was nothing else to do. Horror, rage, indignation might have been in each at what the other had openly admitted—instead they were only peevish and disappointed, like spoilt children denied a boon.

"Murder, per'aps, is more easily done amongst men," said M. Cuvelier in the manner of one offering

consolation to a fellow sufferer. "We must not blame ourselves too much. In civilization one of us might well 'ave been dead by now, yet 'ere in the wilderness where such things should not matter at all we are 'orrified into the laughter of hysteria at the very thought of killing! A strange business, monsieur. But it becomes farcical—we become farcical—our talk, it is farcical! We 'ad better confine ourselves to the rescuing of the Evan Jones. Come, let us go to bed, and sleep sound, monsieur. It is no use: men who 'ave been made to laugh at each other and themselves—they cannot kill. Fate is too strong and too much the cruel jester, Kingsclere. I admit defeat. 'Ave no fear. I should not dare to stab you lest I woke in 'ell with all the little devils jeering at the man who 'ad run a knife into 'is own 'eart!"

While he spoke he rose, stretching and checking yawns. Sudden exhaustion had come upon them after the spiritual and physical strain. They gave it up, went heavily, in silence, across the clearing, and passed under the low eaves of the hut. Presently the glimmer of the lantern was put out. The fire dwindled. The village ceased to be. It was buried deep in jungle, deep in night, deep in sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

In the broad, harsh light of day, with nerves and sinews refreshed, the revelations of the previous evening were a fantastic memory. Their candour seemed insane; the calmness with which they had debated such extraordinary things tested credulity; their fine and philosophical aloofness was a child of the night and died with the night. They felt shy and awkward. Avoiding each other, exchanging as few words as possible and making no reference to what had passed between them, they hastened to be away, welcoming the relief and privacy provided by the rigours of the march.

Throughout the day they remained morose, walking in single file and finding nothing to talk about when they paused for rest. Bitterness had turned to exasperation, and hatred sprang up again with undiminished intensity though from a different source. Leila was not so present in each mind. They could not think of her without disquiet, and so, deliberately, put away her disturbing picture. As victims of a savage practical joke their passions were robbed of all dignity. In a sense she suffered with them. No redress seemed possible. Each tried to blame the other, and only succeeded partially. There was no peace in them.

Late afternoon found the straggling line pushing stolidly forward. Their way took them through different surroundings now. They had abandoned the stream, and were following exposed, razor-backed

ridges which rose above the jungle like reefs from the sea. On either hand the waves of green flooded up and down the slopes, presenting an unbroken surface on which it seemed they might have walked. Shaly rocks slipped and crumbled beneath their feet. Lizards, snakes and scorpions slid away. The unseen sun beat down with a heat like that given off by molten lead. Tremendous black masses of cloud had come up from behind the Western horizon, filling the heavens and burdening the air. Birds flew low, the cockatoos drifting like pieces of white paper above the tree-tops and screaming in alarm. These and the creeping things were the only other signs of life. The men, like a column of ants, crept through a world numbed by suspense. There was no breath to stir the lightest leaf. Thunder rumbled afar. It had a hollow sound, like thunder heard at sea. Despite heat and exertion their skins remained dry and harsh. They thirsted.

Kingsclere's head burned. Queer sounds were in his ears, and occasionally he stumbled when there was nothing to trip his feet. He had a sensation of being burned by his own blood where it came near his skin: in his wrists, in his neck and about his ankles. He thought it would cheer him if he sang loudly and bravely the little song the band had played at Pierre's. He did so. M. Cuvelier made no sign, but went on like the automaton he was.

"The reason why he doesn't pay heed is that he doesn't understand all this singing means—he hasn't got my memories," thought Kingsclere cunningly and in triumph, finding strength to drag his heavy feet forward.

But that was not the reason. The reason was that no sounds came from Kingsclere's lips.

The clouds crushed the daylight away. Down the darkened vistas of the valleys flashing curtains of lightning hung low in the sky.

M. Cuvelier called the boy who was their guide and questioned him in the dialect. Then he sent him and the bearers ahead. M. Cuvelier did not pretend to be an humanitarian. Snakes and scorpions abounded and the dark was coming.

"As well! It is not far now! The storm! . . ." he said briefly over his shoulder, and moved on.

Kingsclere made no answer, for he resented the patronage he detected in this information. Cuvelier tried to hint he was spent, but did a beaten man have the strength to sing like this at the top of his lungs? Hell, no——!

And so he continued to irritate M. Cuvelier by holding up gallantly until they reached the village. Night had shut down by then, black and ominous, but when the preliminaries were over and arrangements had been hastily completed M. Cuvelier noticed the other's face in the glare of a fire.

"You are in for a touch of fever, my friend," said he. "The sooner that you get to bed the better it is."

Kingsclere wanted to deny this and damn the man for his impudence, but the words would not come to his tongue. He recognised that he had taken too much out of himself with his singing and all of that. The knowledge terrified him. He was alone in the thunder-wracked waste with his foe, and the strength was being pressed out of him as the juice is pressed from an orange. He saw that his wasteful bravado

had put him at the Frenchman's mercy, and, thoroughly humbled now, decided to warn the boys to stand guard. He felt so weak that he would have stooped gladly to implore his enemy to deal justly and kindly with such a tired man, because. . . . because. . . .

M. Cuvelier spoke curt orders. The boys picked up Kingsclere and carried him into the big central hut.

The storm broke in a crackling sheet of lightning which burned up the night and revealed the ranges—white, still, silent—rising in endless array. The light was blinding in its intensity, but M. Cuvelier could have believed that, in the instant, it showed him individual trees—even individual leaves—and at the same time the whole of the great island spread out at his feet like a relief map in glistening salt. Blackness snapped back, and thunder roared and volleyed until it seemed that the mountains were being flung into collision. He retreated to the hut, receptive and observant. This carnival of the heavens pleased him.

Again the flood of lightning; again the reverberating explosions of thunder—and then the rain. It came with a roar and a rush, a solid mass of water which shut out the world as though a silver door had closed. It beat on the thatch with a continuous and fierce attack which threatened to sweep the hut away. The air grew chilled, wet, sodden. When the lightning burst again it showed no more than solid masses of silver threads hurrying down and down out of the quartz-white sky.

M. Cuvelier retreated a little further into shelter, and, sitting down on a three-legged stool he found

there, lit a cheroot. It burned damply and crookedly for a time and went out. He did not heed that; he did not seem to heed anything save the tempest. He might have been the last man alive—a lonely Noah too absorbed by the spectacle of a drowning world to regret the ark unbuilt.

Out of the interior of the hut a boy brought a lantern and set it on the ground at his side. In accordance with instructions—for he had no appetite and only wished to rest—cold rations were served to him there, and these he ate perfunctorily, engrossed in the spectacle which in its stark grandeur so excellently fitted his mood. For M. Cuvelier was instructing himself not to hope.

"One would be a fool," he reflected aloud, addressing the elements as a man will who has lived in contact with them, "to imagine that it would be worth any power's while to help or harm an insect like you, Paul. There are little gauze-winged flies perishing out there. Does it trouble you?"

That was the whole secret. Fate would not intervene to help. This illness of Louis Kingsclere's was not an intervention on his behalf.

The boys, their tasks accomplished, filed past. They held their loin-cloths rolled in their hands, and naked, like swimmers, dived out into the night with guttural whoops—vanished.

In the first few moments the fury of the skies had seemed too intense to be sustained, but thunder and lightning continued to riot and there was no end to the rain. By its very persistence the turmoil gradually ceased to excite and became lulling. M. Cuvelier, nodding, was aroused by a sudden splutter of icy

drops from a leak above. Taking up the lantern he walked back into the hut, surveying the place with ironical appreciation. What a sanctuary on such a night for him and Kingsclere!

In the dim light, possessed by the storm, it was wild and eerie as a cave assailed by the sea. The feeble rays gave it an effect of immense height. The walls rose and met far above like the sides of an inverted, elongated letter U. All about black masses dwelt, stirring as the lantern swung and growing articulate in the hissing of the torrents. Barbed spears and feather-coated shields were revealed, and from long totem-poles strings of faces grinned obscenely. The pearl-shell eyes of a row of skulls watched M. Cuvelier with hungry interest. Jets of water spouted down, increasing the suggestion of weird and general life. The ground beneath his feet was wet, and a stale and musky smell hung heavily in the air. His own shadow—long and distorted—flowed away from him to join the shadows above, which, he fancied, might well have been a dark company stolen in from the flooded jungle in quest of shelter.

He crossed to Kingsclere. The roof above was sound and the man lying on a mat-covered platform was dry, but M. Cuvelier had not come to satisfy any anxiety on such counts. He considered Marie's husband with callous eyes. Kingsclere had flung off the blankets and was writhing and moaning. His restless hands were so tightly clenched that the nails seemed to bite into the flesh. With each hard-won breath his chest rose and fell. He burned; he shivered. The hard lines of his lips moved incessantly, babbling unheard words. The skin of his face was stretched

tightly over its bones and his eyes gleamed emptily, but M. Cuvelier pessimistically refused to draw a happy omen from the strong resemblance his rival bore to one of the staring skulls.

He was tired now. The time had come for sleep.

As he turned away without compunction, Kingsclere sat upright, and, flinging out his arms, glared before him. His body was rigid; he looked at nothing with terrible concentration; he raved. Then with deliberate movements he swung his body around, and put his feet to the ground. M. Cuvelier stood motionless, a prickling sensation running down his spine as he realised what might happen. The man did not hesitate. He moved away with peculiar, steady lurchings—his right hand thrust forward as if it clasped that of an unseen comrade—and passed out of the radius of the lantern. M. Cuvelier remained still, a spectator.

A flash of lightning came. In it he saw Kingsclere nearing the door. Beyond it he saw, also, the pitiless waves of the ranges rising ghostly through the torrents. The picture was blotted out, but, while the thunder bellowed, he saw with equal vividness another in which that figure—helpless, lost, doomed—was led on by his grim guide, through the drenched wilderness, whipped by the rain, bare-footed and bareheaded, stumbling, growing colder and colder. The eye of his imagination followed the figure while it dwindled and became more forlorn and tiny, more lost to man and the world, until at last it was a mere atom wandering chill and lone in the black infinities of space.

A shudder ran through M. Cuvelier.

"No! No! No!" he gasped, and, putting the lantern down, sprang across to snatch his enemy back from that journey the thought of which was beyond endurance.

They fought grimly in the darkness, in the clamour of the storm, watched by skulls. And, even in the midst of the struggle, M. Cuvelier was laughing derisively at himself and the merciless persistence of Fate. What a setting and what a night for a fight to death, and here he fought for his enemy's life!—desperately, as if for his own! Kingsclere's strength snapped, and he began to whimper. M. Cuvelier half led and half carried him back to the couch. The man had become a child. He clung, craving protection. M. Cuvelier soothed him with murmurs and the pressure of steady hands, and all the time his face in the lantern light wore an expression of amused protest. He heard himself cursed, heard appeals to ward off monsters which crept out of the past and bore his name, heard Leila sobbed for, heard broken phrases and echoes to which he had no key, heard things which should have made him blush or flame in rage—but M. Cuvelier was resigned. Nothing could deter him. No glow of self-satisfaction warmed him. The more he did the more humbled he felt and the more scornful. But the only possible course was to suffer with a good grace.

Gradually Kingsclere grew calmer, and he was able to get quinine, phenacetin and spirits from the medicine-box which the boys had put to hand. With these he treated the patient for whom he felt neither pity nor sympathy. But the task had to be done. Then he waited, sitting on the edge of the platform and

suffering purgatory in the effort to keep awake.

"So it is my turn now, eh?" he said aloud once. The thought occupied him. A pawn! . . .

A wind arose. It whooped and whistled about the hut. The rain no longer pelted down, but was driven in sudden bursts upon the thatch. M. Cuvelier dozed, still sitting upright.

When he awakened Kingsclere no longer groaned and tossed. The sweating had begun and had brought relief. The white skin was deluged with the easing streams; the taut line of the lips was broken; sleep had come upon him. M. Cuvelier had valued his dignity and felt that the only way to restore it even in part was to be thorough. Fate had ordained that he should nurse his foe; the only proper retort was to be the best of nurses. He slept again, still without lying down, and, having set his mind as one sets an alarm-clock, was aroused in some dead hour of the night. The lantern had burned low. He uncovered Kingsclere, took the soaked blankets away, dried the man's body, clad him in his own pyjamas and covered him with his own bedding. Then, at last, he found a certain satisfaction and could afford to relax. Kicking off his boots he stretched himself wearily on the edge of the platform, and, before exhaustion overpowered him, remembered to fling his arm across the form beside him so that at any definite movement he would be warned.

"So droll!" he thought cloudily, "probably he imagines that the arm is the arm of Marie."

But it was useless to rebel. He only wished to rest.

The lantern guttered out. Darkness held the hut for a brief space, and then the grey dawn came in.

The wind fell. In the thin light the skulls grinned malignantly at the sleepers. The sound of a million drops falling from huts and leaves beat a steady rhythm through which broke the heavy breathing of the two men.

Boys stole about, but did not disturb their masters. It was noon before M. Cuvelier awoke. He sat up, stiff and sore and dazed, eyes dazzled by the sunshine, and, fingering his scalp as if to massage it back to life, saw that the man at his side, and remembered. The troubles had gone from Kingsclere. He was at peace. But M. Cuvelier found no satisfaction in the success of his labours. He turned his back hastily, thrust his feet into his boots and shuffled out into a cleansed and steaming world where he bathed and fed and meditated. Throughout the day he avoided the hut like a plague spot. He was irritable. The boys were soon informed of his mood. Although his cuffs and kicks were distributed in an absent-minded way that did not lessen their frequency or viciousness. He was left alone to brood upon the wide panorama of polished green hills and vacant sky.

Towards evening a timid bearer approached with the news that Kingsclere had returned to life. M. Cuvelier waved him away, but rose reluctantly and went to the hut where he found Marie's husband sitting up, shaken but sound, weak but himself again.

They exchanged glances full of significance.

"Hullo," said Kingsclere, clumsily, "I've been out to it, haven't I?"

"You 'ave," said M. Cuvelier standing before him, hands thrust deep into pockets, feet apart: "Yes, you

'ave. I should say a bad dose of fever combined with exhaustion, and, per'aps, a touch of the sun. You were off your 'ead, my friend."

There was a difficult pause while they read each other's eyes. M. Cuvelier tapped the ground with his foot; Kingsclere scraped the stubble on his jaw.

"You nursed me!" This was an accusation.

"I did—the good God only knows why."

"I'm in your pyjamas!" The statement carried a world of meaning. An impish light came into the grey eyes.

"Well, what of it?"

"Nothing," Kingsclere apologised, ashamed. "Thanks, Cuvelier——!" Embarrassment could not completely hide his gratitude.

"I do not want your thanks," M. Cuvelier began surlily, and then suddenly jerked his hands out of his pockets and flung them wide in a gesture which abandoned a hopeless deceit. "Bah!—what is the use of not sharing the joke? I am made the more ridiculous—but is that possible? Yes, I nursed you—nursed you and saved your life. You are to consider the position: It is a great storm raging 'ere, and you are off your 'ead—mad as any poor mad maggot could be. You arise, you stagger towards that door there. Outside, you will perceive, certain death waits. I am letting you go—I, standing 'ere, my 'ands by my sides. I 'ave only to close my eyes, to give way to fatigue, and it is over. Instead, I am made as mad as you. I rush after you, I snatch you back, I fight you as if you were trying to kill me and not yourself. I drag you back, I nurse you, I do everything for you the night through and with my eyes heavy as

lead. I sleep with my arm across you lest harm should come. Bah! Bah!" He snapped contemptuous fingers.

"But why——?" the other asked. He understood, but he knew not what to say.

M. Cuvelier clenched his fist and shook it in Kingsclere's face.

"You 'ave no right to ask that," he stormed in comical indignation. "Why did you 'it the snake?" The angry fist became an accusing finger. "Do you think it is any more that I want to save you than you did to save me? No! No! No!—and you do not think it! Oh, it is 'opeless, impossible! You English-speakers 'ave the swear-word foolish which is the only word to express what it is that I feel about it all—because it is the word foolish, because it is futile, meaningless. We are bloody mocked fools on a bloody fool mission. No men would believe two men could be such bloody fools, but that is only because they are bloody fools too, as big bloody fools as we are; ah, that is better——!" He wiped his brow and shrugged. "It is that I blow off the steam, you appre'end," he went on quizzically. "To one of your phlegm such a display of emotion must seem almost indecent, and who are we to talk of blood? We are innocent of it. We should talk of the doves and the roses. The language, also, is only worthy of our friend Boyce, that Australian." The name switched him off on to another line of thought. "And to think," he mourned, "that I might 'ave remained with them on their oil 'unt and 'ave retained my self-respect."

He glared at the grinning skulls.

Kingsclere, convalescent, looking out at the sunny

world to which he had been restored, smiled sympathetically at the Frenchman, but he found nothing to say for a time. Then he remarked: "Cuvelier, it's a pity we're being forced to an appreciation of each other. For, you see, we're quits again now—you've given me back a life for the life I gave you. We could start even—and anything might happen!"

This—as M. Cuvelier knew—was not meant, but he was in no state to allow even the ethical proposition to pass unchallenged.

"No," he said, "you are wrong. It is too late. We 'ave been tricked out of our spirit. If by any chance it is that only one of us returns from this expedition it will be because that the other 'as laid down 'is life for 'im. It only needs that—and who knows that it will not be so? What mockery then, my friend, eh? —what mockery?"

His hands asked how Kingsclere regarded that possibility—his smile suggested that nothing was too fantastic to happen to them—but without waiting for an answer he turned on his heel and walked out of the hut into the mellow evening.

CHAPTER XIX

M. Cuvelier's decision to abandon the attempt to reach the village that night had been welcomed by Kingsclere who still felt weak. They had pushed on until late in the evening, but it had become increasingly evident that the guide had only the vaguest conception of how much further they had to go. They had halted, therefore, in a small natural clearing, the bearers had stretched a strip of canvas across a pole to serve as a tent, and the meal had been quickly devoured for the crisp air had sharpened their appetites.

"One smoke, monsieur, and then to sleep," said the Frenchman. "We must be away with dawn. The sooner our job is done the better it is. Our misfortunes 'ave delayed us. I 'ave the concern for that little Evan Jones."

"Yes," Kingsclere agreed, lighting his pipe, "I'm worried about him, too. We seem to have been ages on our way."

The real purpose of their mission had become increasingly important, the dark, obscuring side-issues having been left behind in their march through the miles of jungle and even further through emotional experiences. Inevitably, comradeship had been established between them. Hatred had been transmuted into sympathy, scorn into tolerant amusement or even admiration. They had been drawn together. Their minds, lacking distractions and occupied with similar concerns, worked now as one.

"And yet we 'ave only the night of the fifth day!"

"Seems like years!"

They sat marvelling at how long it seemed since they had walked down Wilhelminastraat in the bright morning. Netherlandia was the scene of an earlier life from which they were cut off. Certain things had happened there, but they could no longer give them their former values. Memories of the high veranda had been thrust back by more recent and sharper sensations. Physical effort had filled their days and purged their souls. The realisation of these things occupied them while they smoked and watched the fire. As if by mutual arrangement their eyes were raised simultaneously and their glances met.

"Kingsclere, it is as if you 'ad killed me in truth, and I you, and now with greater wisdom we looked back and be'eld 'ow foolish it was that ever we grew troubled about the affairs of life. We are dead to the world out 'ere, Kingsclere—that is the explanation of it. We are dead to the world; the world is dead to us. We 'ave attained the repose of a dead man in 'is coffin. Think, my friend, of all the fuss and woe of a funeral and think, then, of 'ow futile it must appear to the quiet one who rides so peaceful in the 'earse!"

"Not a bad way of putting it—not so bad at all!" Kingsclere agreed. He pushed the ash down in his pipe. "You know, it's this jungle." A sweeping gesture indicated the encircling wall. "Yes, we're buried right enough—buried miles deep."

They seemed to be. It was as though their journey had been down a perpendicular shaft rather than across land. They had reached the bottom of the pit that night. The sides were closing in. There was

barely room now for the scrap of canvas and the two fires. Their little party might have been the remnants of the human tribe. Even the apelike villagers had been left behind. It was difficult to imagine that on the morrow they would find another man of their own race down in those hidden depths.

"And Marie," said M. Cuvelier quietly in the quiet, breaking a long silence, "It is only now when that she becomes as unreal as the girl of a dream that I begin to understand 'er." He raised his brows in needless inquiry. "To you, also, she is unreal?—we can talk of 'er so?"

"Yes, we can. It's extraordinary! To tell you the honest truth, Cuvelier, I can hardly realise that she is my wife. She's so far away!—so lost!" He passed his hand across his brow as was his habit when completely puzzled. "Even your way of calling her Marie helps the effect. It's as though we both loved different women in the same body." He paused again. "Leila——!" he breathed, conjuring her up, but his eyes did not brighten with recognition—they remained dreamy, the eyes of a man remembering. "Leila——!" he repeated, and now he was not speaking to M. Cuvelier. He looked down into his pipe. "A widower must feel like this—at first." His voice was that of a mourner fighting against the good services of relentless Time which bore him further and further from a dear one.

He opened his mouth to speak again, but no words came, and he remained bowed over his pipe. M. Cuvelier's brown eyes were sharp. He is thinking, mused M. Cuvelier, that if anything had happened to me he would still have her close to him. He is

blaming me, blaming himself, and all the time the explanation is that he is a man and except in the flesh no woman is truly real to him. Aloud he resumed reflectively, his words blending with the other's considerations: "Yes, we dead men can talk of 'er without passion, at last, and with some understanding. She is further from me than from you, for you are right: we love different people. You love Leila, the woman, and I Marie, the child. It is strange—at this moment I see 'er more clearly in the little square of Vence near the fountain with the old cathedral there be'ind 'er than I see 'er at your 'ouse in Netherlandia. Yes, it is strange."

"That," the other explained, "is why I hated you, Cuvelier."

"But why?"

"You came out of the past bringing her memories which threatened our happiness. We had buried the past."

"Ah, monsieur, but what a foolish enterprise. I 'ave the more wisdom—I should bury the present and past and keep the future."

"I thought we had succeeded," Kingsclere went on, unheeding. "Of course, we hadn't. You were a warning and a sign——!"

"You flatter me. I, Paul Cuvelier, am no more than a buyer of plumes and pearls, an idler, a failure." He snapped his fingers at himself. "But we have wandered from what I was going to say the while since. Your Leila always puzzled me, dismayed me. I could not guess what she was thinking. 'Er calm! . . . But now I see that all the time I was looking at 'er as Marie, the child. I knew she

was Leila, but I could not free my mind of Marie, the child." He brooded, and the crackling of the fire was the only sound in the great night. "The trouble was that I loved 'er, Kingsclere, and did not merely desire 'er," he said simply. "I 'ad always foreseen that when I fell in love those other women whom I know so well—the easy ones, the bought ones—would be the 'andicap to me. It is a long theory. I trouble you not with it now. Per'aps another time. . . . But this is what I want to say: I see now —and whether it means that I 'ave been mocked out of love and left with only the dream-love, Marie, I cannot tell—that that wonderful quiet, that wonderful calm you loved so—it was not the attribute of the child I loved, but of the woman who had been on a long journey—a journey longer and stranger than ours." He checked, inviting Kingsclere to silence him with a protest should he desire to do so. But Kingsclere had never needed illusions in his love for Leila. He was listening with attention, applying M. Cuvelier's formula to her, and recognising how right it was.

"Per'aps if I 'ad seen that in time things would 'ave been different. But I loved 'er, Marie. . . . She 'as foiled you as completely as she 'as foiled me, but with you it did not matter and you did not mind, for you were in love with Leila. But, Monsieur, supposing we could be both transported to Netherlandia at this moment, and meet 'er after *our* long journey in just our present mood—what would 'appen? Should not we be as wise as 'er—'er equals for the first time?—able to understand 'er? Of course, we cannot be transported magically, but it is

an interesting point to consider what might 'appen. And even if when we snap back, as we shall, to our old selves when we see the smoke of Netherlandia in the air, will not that, too, be an interesting meeting?"

Kingsclere nodded, but made no other answer. Nor was one necessary, for there were shadows on his face and in his eyes which the warmth of the firelight could not dispel.

M. Cuvelier regretted that his introspection should cause his companion pain. He flung it off, and became practical. "But all this is only the surmise," he pointed out. "We waste our strength. Let us give it up. There is only one thing of which I am certain, and that is that I am going to sleep."

But even in this certainty M. Cuvelier was wrong.

For, as he lifted himself to his feet, the bearers about the other fire—some of whom had been sleeping while others chattered quietly—started up and, grouped together, peered into the darkness. They looked like a cluster of bare-stemmed, black-headed thistles.

In answer to an inquiry one said: "Master, two fellows stop along!"—and brown arms pointed to the jungle.

The white men listened, but heard nothing save the sounds of the wilderness so familiar to their ears that they were scarcely conscious of them. They remained, one on either side of the fire, keenly attentive. The hearing of the natives could be relied upon, and there was no danger of an attack, but excitement stirred in the air so that the little clearing was like a pool into which a stone has been

thrown. The knowledge of someone approaching, unseen but perhaps seeing, out of the mystery of the night set nerves tingling.

Out of that mysterious night, a form appeared, taking shape slowly like a shadow materialising into a man. With deliberate steps the figure drew nearer and paused on the edge of the firelight with right hand upflung in salutation.

"Analoolie——!" M. Cuvelier's exclamation of surprise and relief snapped out sharply, and silence held them again.

The native lowered his arm with a slow movement and crossed it on his breast, holding in place the sheet of scarlet trade calico in which he was wrapped from head to foot. He was more the Lost Tribesman than ever—erect, stately, still. The firelight caught a deeper hue from his cloak, and his face was seen in ruddy brightness. His aquiline features in their frame of oily ringlets revealed fanatical exultation; his eyes shone like an animal's; about his full mouth froth had dried in white lines. He was not one of the brown men with whom they were familiar; he was foreign to that setting. Watching this dignified and enigmatic creature they were forced to a grudging admission that he had at least pictorial justification for his pretensions. Their minds protested that he was only a mission boy—their senses almost accepted him as a strange survival from the past, a living fossil buried for centuries in these undisturbed depths of green.

The cry of a night-bird came, thin and burdened with loneliness. The stars were bright and hot in the clear sky. For a long moment the flickering flames

and the shadows which they created were the only signs of life in the clearing. And then, with an effort, M. Cuvelier flung off the spell imposed by this intrusion.

"Well, Analoolie——?" he said, with an assumption of easiness, endeavouring to catch the manner appropriate to an interview with a boy.

But Analoolie was not to be subdued. His spiritual intoxication rendered him invulnerable. With a smile of condescension, which revealed black fangs, he began to speak in the coastal dialect.

Kingsclere could only grasp an occasional phrase or a word of English here and there, but M. Cuvelier understood and listened, brows creased, to the steady flow of gutterals, his fixed attention a flattering tribute to Analoolie's powers. The Tribesman spoke without pause. Kingsclere recognised that whatever he said he knew literally by heart. No gestures and none of the side-glances and cringings which would have been natural marred his manner. The complete faith which was in him gave him unshakeable assurance. He was not a native in the presence of white masters, but a man with a great message—a message which raised him above all lesser peoples. It was an honour for them to be allowed to hear him, and he succeeded so well in conveying this that they were compelled to give him earnest heed, wondering that they did so, wondering why the insolence of his address could not be rebuked.

Analoolie's voice at first was harsh but subdued; as his tale unfolded, however, his words quickened to a torrent. His body did not move, but his face

was that of a man possessed. Sweat streamed upon it, his lips worked and were flecked with foam, the whites of his eyes showed as he rolled them to look up on high. He held his audience hypnotised. White men and brown were bound and gagged. The harangue climbed to a guttural, strangled cry and broke off sharply, abruptly, as if he had been stricken dumb. He paused for a breath holding them with a fixed stare. Then he raised his hand again, the lean, sinewy arm glistening.

"John the Baptist!" he said solemnly. "Judas!"

Haughtily he drew his wrap about him, turned on his heel and left them. The darkness received him. His exit was as dramatic and completely successful as all the rest. He had vanished like an apparition. They were left facing the dim bank of jungle.

M. Cuvelier's hands went up to his moustache.

Kingsclere appealed to him with nervous eagerness. "What is it? What's he up to?" He clamoured to be admitted to the knowledge of which he was afraid. The night was so still and quiet and empty now.

"That man—that Analoolie—'e 'as bewitched me," M. Cuvelier complained, still watching the jungle. "I let 'im say what 'e liked—I 'ave let 'im go! It is the madness——!" He seemed dumbfounded by his reactions.

"But what did he say?"

M. Cuvelier turned to his companion. For a second he was lost for words, but his hands, his face, his shoulders protested against this visit, its meaning and

its effect on them. When he spoke it was on the same indignant note.

"'E is unique, that Analoolie," he burst out. "There 'as never been such another. One is not prepared for 'im. You saw 'im there—that Lost Tribesman! . . . And 'is story—it confirms all that we 'ave 'eard. This unfortunate—the Evan Jones, 'e 'as indeed been made more mad and drawn into the strange adventure. 'E 'as gone among these people with 'is cockatoo and that Analoolie as John the Baptist. You saw 'im, that Analoolie—'is fire, 'is strength, 'is passion! You 'ave seen its effect on us —on *me*—on Paul Cuvelier who 'as been dealing with the natives 'alf 'is life. 'Is own people, then, and the Evan Jones 'ave been clay in 'is 'ands. 'E 'as done what 'e will with them. 'E 'as inspired the Evan Jones to play 'is mad man's part with perfection. The Evan Jones 'as distributed 'is goods among them, 'e 'as preached, 'e as worked miracles of 'ealing—though God alone knows 'ow much of these miracles 'as been due to simple medicines and 'ow much 'as been really miraculous due to the simple faith. And this Analoolie is 'ere now to say that it is right we should come; that 'e 'as known we should; that all is in readiness. To 'im we are merely men sent to carry back to all the world the news that the Messiah reigns 'ere in the 'eart of New Guinea, and to make the story and the name of Analoolie and 'is tribe ring over the earth for all time. 'E 'as 'allucinations superb, that Analoolie—'e is burned up with the sublime ambitions of utter madness. We are the slaves sent to carry his message!—we are!" He struck his breast. "And I

'ave let 'im go without so much as a kick—without so much as a word! But per'aps it is well I was too surprised to do a thing. The preparations 'e 'as made for our coming are admirable!—admirable! We shall find 'im alone with the Evan Jones—the tribesmen will 'ave been sent away. We may trust 'is word. 'Is last wish is that we—the 'umble messengers—should come to 'arm before our task is accomplished. 'E 'as kindly cleared the way for us. Good! I will shoot that Analoolie like a dog; I will burn the village to the ground; Evan Jones shall return to the civilized asylum where 'e can preach to the warders—'e may do good to them. 'E cannot stay out 'ere making us whites the joke, the children, the doers of Analoolie's will!"

He shook his fist at the black jungle. To have been made the plaything of Destiny was bad enough. M. Cuvelier's temper had given out when he found Analoolie seeking to force him into a similar rôle. But the true source of his wrath lay deeper. Through his threats ran a note of something like panic—a panic arising from the recognition of eerie and terrible forces at work. Kingsclere detected that note. It strengthened his own intangible but strong apprehensions.

"He called himself Judas!" he remarked unhappily.

"Bah!—'e is everything, that Analoolie. 'E plays every part. 'E is not content to be John—'e must be all the twelve—'e must be the Judas." M. Cuvelier's scorn, however, was even less convincing now.

"Come, let's get away—dark or not, tired and all. This business has got on my nerves. This damned

jungle with its gloom and weirdness has given me the jumps. I shan't sleep till we get this fixed. Come on, Cuvelier, for God's sake—let's shove on right away!"

"Assuredly—that is what we must do," the other jibed. "We 'ave our orders from our master, that Analoolie. We are to arrive at the dawn. It is 'is wish. And we must do it, as you say. We need fear no trouble, no ambush. But we are sane men and 'e is mad. That is an advantage. We take it. It does not occur to 'im that we may dynamite 'im into the 'eaven or 'ell of which 'e raves. Oh yes, friend Analoolie, we will be there at dawn!" He grew darkly gleeful, rubbing his hands together at the prospect. "Consider 'ow the Analoolie keeps 'is promises. 'E said a guide would be sent knowing an easy path. Be'old the guide sent by Analoolie to lead us to the end of our task!"

He jerked his head directing Kingsclere's attention. Kingsclere started about. On the edge of the clearing another Tribesman stood, but he was not Analoolie—he was a stunted mountain man wearing a bright loin-cloth, strings of glass beads, a blue shirt and a cheap felt hat.

"Bah," spat M. Cuvelier, "this follower of the new Messiah is a Russian Jew in fear of a pogrom. Well, per'aps 'e is more wise than that Analoolie—per'aps more wise. Come, let us be busy!"

Kingsclere obeyed with alacrity, for, even though absurd in appearance, this new visitant who had emerged out of the blackness carried on the suggestion of sinister events in progress behind that silent screen. He was Hebraic; his grotesque costume was

made up from goods distributed by Evan Jones. He waited there, dumb and silent, the slave of Analoolie's will, a humble and deluded worshipper, one of the rank and file of this strange church in process of creation in the wilderness.

The quiet of the clearing was shattered. M. Cuvelier dispersed the uneasy group of bearers, driving from their childish minds the fear of the unknown by the more immediate danger of blows and kicks. Packs were tied; the tent was struck; the white men took their rifles, inspected and loaded them, wrapped them about with strips of waterproof. They thrust packets of ammunition into their pockets. The natives looked askance at the barrels glinting in the firelight. The guide stirred, but faith was stronger than fear and he stood his ground.

Both men were easier. The bustle had quickened their blood; the touch of the steel was heartening, promising a tangible foe and an immediate and successful outcome to their adventure. All was ready. The fires were trampled out, and darkness flooded the clearing.

M. Cuvelier snapped commands, and crossed to the guide. He jerked his rifle at the man.

"Lead!" he said. "Try funny business, my friend, and I send you straight to your Je'ovah—quick, one time!"

The Tribesman did not understand the words, but their meaning was evident. He knew what was expected of him. With a grunt he turned and moved off.

"You come last, Kingsclere, and keep those bearers 'erded up close between us. I think that they are too afraid to desert, but we take no chances."

"All right!"

In single file they tramped out of the clearing and into the depths again.

Night wrapped about them. Their eyes saw nothing and yet a narrow way opened steadily before, as Analoolie's promises continued to be fulfilled and the guide, as if by magic, found paths through the seemingly impenetrable mass. It was a nightmare march. They were drenched by the dew from the lashing boughs; the invisible ground tripped them; they were lost in the black pit. Sometimes they saw the stars; sometimes they heard streams; sometimes mysterious rustlings moved away from them. The physical and nervous strain was agonising at first, but as time passed they accepted the ordeal fatalistically, having reached a stage when they could experience no more. Weariness served as a narcotic. They ceased to think, and, paying to Analoolie the tribute of complete trust, toiled blindly, numbly, mechanically, towards whatever he had prepared for them.

For an immeasurable space of time only darkness, the shuffle of feet, branches whipping their faces, the ground rising up or falling away, moisture, cold, utter wretchedness. . . .

So gradually that they were scarcely aware of change they walked into a new day. The world began to evolve out of nothingness, dimly and slowly as if seen through frosted glass, which was gradually clearing. They were warned of boughs in time to avoid them. The shapes of the trees showed shadowy. Above a pale gleam of silver appeared through a fretwork of tangled lines. A clean smell, fresh and cheering, tickled their nostrils.

M. Cuvelier straightened his back. Some resiliency returned to his step. The mysterious presence after whom he had blundered became again a native in trade garments. Witchcraft was a cult of the night, and day brought the resurrection of reason. The fogs cleared from his brain. He grappled with himself and their adventure as a practical person inured to hardship and competent to meet the demands of life in a barbarous land. They were white men going to enforce the white man's law. The thought of dealing death did not distress him, nor did it now spring from savage ill-temper. The crux of the matter was that they would rescue Evan Jones and that Analoolie, dead, would teach a lesson in contradiction of and more lasting than the lesson he had presumed to teach alive.

"This is better, eh, Kingsclere?" he called, almost cheerfully, though his voice was hoarse.

"Much! Never so glad to see the light of day before!"

They plodded on, their sodden clothes steaming.

A narrow glade ended in a well worn track. The Lost Tribesman paused, pointed down the path and jabbered. M. Cuvelier caught the name "Analoolie." He was alert and confident.

"This fellow, 'e will now bolt," he warned Kingsclere. "Let 'im go—and the further the better."

While he spoke M. Cuvelier discreetly turned and surveyed their column. The tribesman dived into the undergrowth like a rabbit and was gone. M. Cuvelier smiled, if somewhat wanly, at this prompt confirmation of his judgment. Beyond the row of

shadowy brown bodies he saw Kingsclere, his khaki black with moisture.

"You 'ad better join me now for the fun. The boys will stick by the devil they know because 'e 'as the guns." He added an order to the bearers, who moved aside to allow Kingsclere to pass. M. Cuvelier saw that his companion was haggard, and that the forced march had played havoc with his already weakened physique, but in the other's kindling eye he found a reflection of his own satisfaction that they had at last come to grips with their business.

Each apprehended perfectly what the other was experiencing, and they did not waste what was left of their energy on words. For a second their glances met. They were excited, stern and pleased. Their conflicts had been with invisible forces; Analoolie was merely flesh and blood. They stripped off the coverings, and looked to their rifles. M. Cuvelier spoke to the bearers whose scared faces showed yellow in the thin light. Birds called above, and, rustling damp wings, sent down sparkling showers of dew from the leaves. Warmth began to permeate the chill dampness of the air. But the dawn had not come in fully yet, and night still lingered in the green aisles.

The scream of a cockatoo came to them, thin and harsh.

"Ah!" said M. Cuvelier and Kingsclere as one. They exchanged significant nods, and went on side by side, cautiously, eagerly, the stream of bearers following reluctantly and at a distance.

Reaching a sharp bend in the path they looked down it—as down a telescope—into the village.

Their field of vision was confined above and on either side by the jungle, but in the centre of the opening they saw Analoolie. He stood on a mound of logs a little distance beyond the end of the path, cut off, isolated, a carved figure in a cameo framed in green. Having cast aside his robe of scarlet he was now naked as the day he was born. Mist floated between, but his face was clear. It worked in a frenzy of bliss. He had expected their advent. The moment they appeared he raised both hands above his head in a gesture of renunciation and agonised regret.

They halted, astounded and impressed by some unknown meaning in this picture.

"An' Judas hang himself!"

The cry, shrill and wild and loud, rang in their ears. It paralysed their muscles. In that second Analoolie stepped off the logs and jerked once, convulsively. Their wrought-up senses heard a sharp click. The body remained in mid-air. Only then did they see the thread of rope which ran from Analoolie's neck up out of sight. He swayed to and fro, his chin pressed crookedly down, his tongue blocking his mouth.

The power of action returned. A dreadful conviction banished thought and caution. They raced down the path, and burst out of the jungle.

It was a big village set in a big clearing. Along one edge of it a river ran, golden and smoking. The ranges towered blue against the silver and the rose. The place was deserted. In the square about which the huts crouched and where Analoolie spun slowly round and round, a cross was raised. Evan Jones hung upon it, a crown of thorns on his head, a spear

wound in his side, the nails he had given them piercing his hands and feet. They had taken his garments, save only a loin cloth. His emaciated little body sagged wearily. His bearded, humble face was bowed in acceptance and resignation. The mists wrapped their long white folds about him. Peace filled the valley and all the sky glowed.

"Dinner of herbs! Dinner of herbs!" screamed the cockatoo Emmanuel, from its place on the top of the cross. The flames under its wings flashed and its scarlet crest was erect.

They comprehended.

"The little man—crucified——!"

The groan was wrung from Louis Kingsclere. He fell on his knees, and held his head in his hands as if his skull were bursting asunder.

M. Cuvelier did not heed. He stood erect and rigid, looking at Evan Jones and past him to the ranges and the sky. Tears ran on his cheeks. Beyond the furthest highest peak the sun rose.

CHAPTER XX

Evan Jones's body could not be taken back to Netherlandia, nor, for very good reasons, could it be buried there. They had made the village his funeral pyre, stripping the huts of palm leaves, tearing and destroying in a morose frenzy, without thought or words and avoiding each other's eyes. Horror had mercifully numbed them; they had lost themselves in their labours. The bearers had worked with them, awed and fearful. On the top of the mountain of fuel they had laid the cross. . . .

Now they stood on the edge of the jungle. Smoke hung in a black and heavy pall. Through it, dimly, the village showed, a place of skeleton homes and abandoned hearths. Occasionally, as the dark clouds shifted, Analoolie became visible, dangling in the air among the ruins like a broken, brown doll. A sluggish column ascended into the brightness of the sky and flattened out staining the blue. The crackling roar of the flames had died away. Nothing remained of the body of Evan Jones. The quiet of utter desolation was descending on the valley. Even the blasphemous chatter of the cockatoo had ceased. The bird, evading them, had fluttered lamely off into the jungle to scream its strange learning among heedless, gossiping companies in glades unknown, lost and far.

"It is over," said M. Cuvelier in a hoarse, cracked voice. "I can bear to stay on more. And per'aps the Tribesmen may return, though it would seem from the emptied 'uts that the destruction of their Jeru-

salem was foretold. I think they will shun this place. The jungle will possess it. Come away, monsieur, come away! It is over!"

It was over. The finality of the phrase tolled in the soul. No other words had been spoken, and Kingsclere made no answer to these. They were strange mourners: dust and ashes clung to their clothes, their hands bled, grime blackened their faces and through it their eyes looked out, empty, fatigued. For twenty-four hours they had had no rest and had endured mental and spiritual trials. Indeed, there had been no peace for them, no respite, since they had marched out of Netherlandia with murder in their hearts. And spent and exhausted as they were they could not pause now.

Nothing more to be said, nothing more to be done —only to get away.

M. Cuvelier signed to the boy who was their guide. Despite fatigue the bearers welcomed that gesture. They were more callous than their masters, but more like children. While their legs continued to carry them they were ready to put distance between them and that haunted spot.

Automatically the units of the little column fell into their places, and it moved off. Kingsclere and M. Cuvelier were like men walking alone. They were unconscious of each other, unconscious even of themselves. Their feet tramped along the path, their arms swung, but their minds were blank. The turn came. No head moved for a last glimpse of Analoolie who, caught in the snare of a dream, had worked out his fate with ruthless completeness. The jungle hid him from human eyes.

The boy set a pace which made their return seem like a rout. They fled back into the green depths, but were not aware of doing so. The effort of moving at all was such a strain, that the added strain of haste could make no impression. The reek of smoke was left behind. They were secluded once more in the hot and heavy quiet of the leaves. It was as if their march had not been interrupted, and for all they saw they might still have been journeying through the night on the heels of the Tribesman who led them to discover what Analoolie had accomplished.

Before noon they came out into just such another space as that in which they had been camped when he had come to them. It was so peaceful there. Big shimmering butterflies drifted lazily. The warm sun beat down. Above was the clear blue. M. Cuvelier gave no orders now. He found the nearest shady spot, dropped on his knees on the grass, crawled to a log, put his head on it, and lay still as the log. They had not eaten; no sentries were placed. Rest was their desire. Kingsclere subsided where he stood. The bearers flung themselves down. It was as if M. Cuvelier's spirit alone had quickened them, and now that it was withdrawn they were left without life. But as they sunk into blessed oblivion they felt their feet still marching, marching, across the treadmill of the ranges. The hush of the heat held the world. Only the butterflies stirred.

The instinct of responsibility arising from his position as leader awakened M. Cuvelier first. He sat up stupidly, the ache persisting in his body and soul. Late afternoon had come and coolness had crept into the air. For a time he watched two red

birds of paradise, beautiful as rubies, dancing on the stark white limb of a dead tree which rose above the jungle against the tingeing sky, but his eyes did not see them. Then the figures sprawled about brought him to the pain of remembering. But his elastic nature was recovering. He roused himself, shaking off his lethargy with a characteristic shrug. Life went on. He was hungry now. With his toe he prodded the boys out of their slumbers and set them to their duties. He crossed to Kingsclere, but—touched by the complete exhaustion expressed in his attitude, head pillowed on outstretched arm, face buried in the grass—decided to let him rest a while longer. Recollecting that they had crossed a stream a short distance back, he went to it, stripped and bathed, revelling in the refreshment of the icy water, and risking the danger of an attack of fever.

Having dried on his singlet he bunched his clothes about his loins and returned to the camp. Fires had been lit, the normal routine restored. Kingsclere had awakened. He was sitting up, and held his head in his hands with elbows resting on his knees.

"Ah, my friend, that is better, eh?" said M. Cuvelier cheerfully, as he reached the clean garments set out for him, and began to dress. "What you want now is the bath. I 'ave 'ad one. It was the delight. But no——! Per'aps it is better that you should take care. A bath might revive you, but——"

"No," said Kingsclere in a muffled way. "No—I don't want to bathe. I must think."

"Think?" echoed the Frenchman, pulling on his shorts and tucking his shirt into them. "But that is

idle, my friend. You exhaust yourself to no purpose. The little Evan Jones—'e, alas, is dead!"

"Yes, and not only Evan Jones is dead!"

Kingsclere had not looked up, and something in his attitude and the manner of this utterance aroused M. Cuvelier's concern. He thrust his bare feet into boots and, leather laces slapping about his ankles, went to his comrade. His face was troubled. Life had hardened him to strange events, but this Kingsclere was a comparative novice. He had been sorely tried, and needed rousing from his morbid state.

"No, not only the Evan Jones. But that Analoolie, also. We have done what we could. Our grief—what use is it? I think 'e died beautifully, the Evan Jones. We must all die, my friend—but shall we die as well as the Evan Jones? What was 'is pain compared with the splendour of 'is vision? What did the truth matter to 'im if 'e believed? 'E died 'appily, the little Evan Jones, even in 'is torment."

He spoke with pity and sympathy; he was gentle and reassuring as if comforting a frightened, tired child. The leaves sighed and whispered. Logs were piled upon the fires by the boys eager to hold at bay the encroaching night. The fickle red light played queerly on the bent form at M. Cuvelier's feet.

"You don't understand—Louis Kingsclere is dead."

M. Cuvelier's teeth clicked together. He was alarmed now. But before he could speak Kingsclere raised his head and revealed his face. The words died in M. Cuvelier's throat, and a quiver of super-

stitious fear ran through him. He gaped, startled into doubting his own sanity.

For the man he saw was not his companion of the previous night, was not Louis Kingsclere who had taken over Gryndheim's plantation, was not Leila's husband. He was a stranger.

And yet M. Cuvelier knew that it could be no other. Fatigue made him the victim of an hallucination, he reasoned, for he had eyes in his head and could see that the features before him were as familiar as his own. Yes, the same—but he could not persuade himself that they were familiar. Eyes, mouth and nose, might be those of Kingsclere, but the face as a whole was not his. Its expression had changed entirely, and the change went far deeper than the mere lines written on it by their experiences. There was a keenness, a sharpness, a virility now; the reserved quiet which had made the man such a maddeningly fit mate for Leila had gone. M. Cuvelier could read that this stranger was daunted and dismayed, but he could also read that he was grappling with the problem which confronted him, planning and deciding. The difference was as great as that between a face seen in sleep or death and the same face seen in the heat and turmoil of life.

He drew a long astonished breath.

"M. Kingsclere——!" he gasped, trying to insist, trying to deny the evidence of his own senses.

The other shook his head.

"No!—Kingsclere's dead. He died back there." He braced himself. "The fact is," he said addressing himself as well as his companion, "my name is Emmet—George Emmet." He turned that aston-

ishing fact over for a second. "I am Sir George Emmet," he said, with a twisted, almost incredulous smile.

"*You* are——?" Nothing more came to M. Cuvelier. He gaped.

"Funny, isn't it?" But now the unknown did not smile. "The game is up—the game of Louis Kingsclere." He spoke out of depths of bewilderment, and rising gripped M. Cuvelier's shoulders in a manner which craved support, assistance and understanding. He was fighting to keep his control, but M. Cuvelier was powerless to aid because the eyes which looked into his were eyes he had never seen before.

A boy intruded with the announcement that dinner was ready.

The man who had been Kingsclere broke into a jerky gust of laughter.

"It's all right, Cuvelier," he said. "You've not gone mad, and all that's happened is that I've been frightened back into sanity. Just to prove it to you here's dinner ready. That's sane and ordinary enough, isn't it? Let's make use of it. I could eat an ox. Let's start. I'll be able to explain better when I've something in my stomach, and it'll give us both time to get a better grip on things."

He released M. Cuvelier and moved away towards the fire. The other followed dazed, realising that he was no longer the leader. The vagueness, the sense of intangibility which he had always felt in Kingsclere was absent from the character of Emmet. The man had become real. It dawned foggily on M. Cuvelier that the house on the hilltop had been

inhabited by two shadows, secretive and strange, who had deceived him into a belief in their life while all the time he had been conscious of the deception. He had the key now to many emotions he had experienced on that veranda, and felt a sense of grievance at the sorcery in which he had been involved. This was no question of the mere shedding of an assumed name. A citizen of Netherlandia would not have been troubled by such a trifle. It was the death of one man and the resurrection of another.

They were eating now, and had called a deliberate truce, but M. Cuvelier continued to dart curious and frightened glances at the grimy figure on the other side of the fire. Sir George Emmet—he was trying to accustom himself to thinking of the stranger so, for the name of Kingsclere was no longer applicable—was watching his plate, and devouring his food with close attention. M. Cuvelier tried to follow the excellent example, but it was difficult while there sat opposite him the shell of the man who had planned to kill him and whom he had planned to kill—the man who had been with him through the horror of the dawn—which was now occupied by somebody else. Yet he hesitated to speak, for he could think of nothing to say. This newcomer was wise. M. Cuvelier forced himself to eat, and drank mugs of black tea greedily.

A glow crept gradually into him, so that when the meal was over he was able to take out his cheroots and light one with a steadier hand. His eyes met those opposite and he spoke as if to an acquaintance.

"I 'ave almost run out of the smokes," he remarked conversationally.

The other nodded.

"That's as good a way as any to begin," he said, "because this is one of those situations in which words are futile."

His restraint was admirable. M. Cuvelier imitated it. He settled himself comfortably, sighed as a man should after a good dinner, blew a cloud of smoke.

"Tell me," he invited casually.

Emmet smiled appreciation.

"Yes," he said, " that's the note to strike and hold. That's the only way it's going to be possible. But it'll help me to tell it all—and there's such a lot to tell. God, with every minute I'm realising what a lot!—all this means, the amazing thing that's happened to me! You don't know what I've been through to-day—this on top of everything else! But I've been stunned, that's the whole thing. I'm only just beginning to grasp it myself." His feelings were getting the better of him. He checked, and struggled for a moment, clenched hands between knees. "It's a wonder I'm not crazy, but I'm not," he asserted. "Bewildered if you like, but deadly sane—sane for the first time in four years. You remember the Yokohama earthquake——?"

M. Cuvelier nodded. His eyes were a-sparkle with excitement.

"I was in that earthquake. I was standing at the bar of an hotel when the whole place came down crash!—like the end of the world." A spasm of pain crossed his face. "When I came-to on a rescue ship I was perfectly all right except that I'd forgotten my identity and all the past as it concerned me."

M. Cuvelier murmured utter astonishment, but

did not interrupt. This was a fitting climax—this Arabian Nights entertainment beneath the glittering stars.

"The last thing I remember was seeing a little doctor man crucified on the bar. Something fell on him and broke his spine, but just for that last second of vision he remained there—arms out along the bar, you see, head hanging on one side—the smoke of falling plaster between us. . . ." He dreamed darkly on that picture.

M. Cuvelier's fingers snapped as the light broke on him.

"And this morning when you came—weary, excited—out into the village and saw——?"

"Precisely: my memory sprang back—the past was restored as something which had been there all the time but on which a door had been closed. At first I was powerless to take it in, and there was so much to do and so much horror—but ever since it's been growing more and more real to me and the four years in between have been growing more shadowy. That doctor man was like Evan Jones—small, bearded. I saw them both crucified. The key turned in the door. It opened. I'd long given up the idea of remembering. I was content: the risk was too great. I believe at first I could have opened that door if I'd had the nerve. But I was a coward. There was a reason. You see, though I didn't know it, I'd been sent away to rest and recover after a complete breakdown due to overwork. Work!—how I'd worked!"

"Ah," sighed M. Cuvelier, "work—what a cruel thing! What an abomination!" He looked in child-

ish wonder at the other. "And all this time you 'ave been what our 'otel people call 'an English milord!'" he added naïvely.

"More or less! More or less!" said Sir George Emmet absently, and then: "No, I've been Louis Kingsclere. But I must tell you it all. I can sort it out as I talk. There is such a lot to tell—such an awful lot. Right from the first, then. I've a defence, you see, for running away like that. The way I see it is that my fear of doctors had become a kind of obsession with me, and even after I'd forgotten it was working on me subconsciously. Also I knew there were troubles behind the door though not what they were. It seemed only sane to die for a little while, retire from life, as it were, and gather strength to go back to whatever I had escaped from. Just take a spell—which, of course, was the very thing I'd been sent away to do. That was at first. People take drugs to forget; I took forgetfulness like a drug. It got me. I couldn't stop. The right time never came. I put it off and put it off. I seemed so happy, so fortunate. Do you follow me?" The question was merely asked to gain a space while he marshalled his thoughts.

"Yes," said M. Cuvelier, "indeed, I 'ave the sympathy. What a temptation! If new lives for old were for sale 'ow many of us could resist the temptation? Not I! Not I!"

"You don't know," said Emmet, bitterly, "just as I didn't. You don't know how dearly you'd have to pay for the new life before it was all over." He took up his thread again. "I saw myself as the creator of a new man. I played fate to myself. But we've

seen something of the workings of Fate together, Cuvelier. I overreached myself."

"These ambitious maggots when they begin to dream! . . ." breathed M. Cuvelier.

"Yet is seemed to be working like a charm. Nothing went wrong with me. A big prize from the Shanghai Club sweepstake completed my freedom. It was a benediction on what I'd done. And then—and then came Leila——!"

M. Cuvelier's head gave a quick, nervous jerk, as the realisation struck him—sharply, like a bullet—that he was involved in the results of this opening of the door. He had been so fascinated by the maelstrom in which the other had been caught that he had had no thought to spare for the implications of the story as they affected him. He sat up, squirrel-like, and tugged his moustache.

"Leila came—!" he repeated. "Leila came—!" He turned that over, but forced his mind from his own concerns to those of the man who was so much more beset by complexities. "Of course, after that you would not wish to remember. No, not when she came!"

Emmet was gazing into the fire with clouded eyes. M. Cuvelier's pulses were unsteady. He dared not pause to think of his hopes.

"Yes, Leila——?" he prompted.

The man still watched the flames. "You see how perfectly she fitted into my life? Without knowing anything she told me she wanted to bury the past. The suggestion came from her without any move on my part. It was intuition! Uncanny!"

"She is like that," agreed M. Cuvelier, "and

be'old the trick of Destiny! We can face it—we are not children about 'er. It does not make 'er the less wonderful, per'aps the more.... Consider 'ow well it suited 'er. She was not Marie, and Leila could afford to forget. But the thing is that she knew she could suggest such a pact. What a woman, monsieur, what a woman! And to me who loved her as Marie she would only live in the past. Not in the present at all. What a woman!"

"And that was why I hated you when you came. You were all past. I had made one woman; you made another and talked with her in my home—talked in French with her of a life from which I was excluded. Do you wonder I hated you? Even before either of us knew, instinct warned me against you. The night you found out that—that she was Marie, I met you with a gun in my hands. That was before—but even that——!"

"I remember, and I felt what it was that was in your mind. I felt it. So that was the 'old you 'ad on 'er which I could not comprehend! That was the secret I could not fathom—you, the man with no past, 'er, the woman with so much—you 'ad forgotten!"

"We'd buried the past in salt at Pierre's," he remembered with a twist of the lips.

"So much there is I begin to understand," murmured M. Cuvelier.

They were silent again, studying the fire. The boys slept curled up like dogs. They were alone. There was nothing in the night to restore them to the values of the world and make them realise how strange all this was. They accepted it and wrestled

with it; the extraordinary had become normal to them.

"Yes, when Leila came that was the end of even playing with the idea of remembering," Emmet went on, out of his reverie. "Sometimes, later, when jealousy of you worried me I fancied I wanted to. But I didn't really. I was a thorough coward by then—I was in too far—and we didn't want to remember, either of us." He looked up suddenly. "You don't think she did, do you?" he questioned.

"Who shall say what Leila thinks? She is a secret. I do not know. I do not know." He was saddened. He averted his head and gazed into the jungle. But he found no answer there to the questions which thronged his brain. "And now——?" he asked, quietly. "What follows? You will take her away?"

Emmet stood up abruptly, thrust his hands into his belt, and, with bowed head, paced to the edge of the firelight, turned, paced back again. He looked haggard and weary, soiled and worn. The cinders of the village still clung to him, his unshaven face still wore its dark mask, his eyes were red-rimmed. M. Cuvelier mused that he had never seen anything less like an English milord. He stood gazing down at the Frenchman, pipe in hand, shoulders bent.

"You've only heard the beginning of it. You don't know what I've been through to-day, or what lies ahead of me. Just think for a moment of what I'm facing. Fancy waking up after four years' sleep! Rip Van Winkle was better off. Life as he knew it had moved on so far that he could start again. But four years is worse. It's too little and too much. I've got to pick up the same threads, but all tangled

and twisted and changed by four years in which I've been dead. Think what can happen in four years, Cuvelier——!"

He moved away again, heavily. M. Cuvelier's sympathetic eyes followed him. In four years——! And not four years of life as it was lived in Netherlandia, but as it was lived in England, and by a man of position and affairs. For M. Cuvelier had already recognised that even apart fom his title Emmet was a bigger and more important personage than Louis Kingsclere, the reserved planter, could ever have been. What a task awaited this man now! And Leila—what part would she play in it?

The man stood above him again, his face and body red against the blackness of the world.

"One thing's certain: I've got to get back to it as quickly as possible and straighten things out." A big man, thought M. Cuvelier. He tried to put himself in the same position, and, realising something of what his emotions would have been, was filled with admiration for the manner in which this resurrected Emmet was grappling with his lot. "That's what I've decided to-day with my head splitting and every bone in my body giving me hell. I've paid for my cowardice, Cuvelier—by God, I have! But that's not all. Here's the point of the whole business—here's what you don't know—I'm a married man with two children. I love my wife and I adore those youngsters. And after four years. . ."

The possibilities sent a wave of panic and weakness through him, and he lost control. The strength went out of him. He sat down on the trampled grass and stared blankly at it, thin wet tracks growing from

the corners of his eyes through the dirt on his face.

M. Cuvelier swore.

"What a position!" he ejaculated helplessly. "What a position!"

He rose and paced about even as Emmet had done. This news changed everything. It affected him directly. Leila was free. But, for the sake of what they had been through together, again he forced himself to concentrate on Emmet's concerns rather than his own.

The fire had burned low and the shadows closed in. Through the hush came the voice of the breeze and the croaking of frogs. M. Cuvelier stooped, scooped up a firefly and, watching the glowing point of light, brought himself to make a suggestion which, if accepted, meant the destruction of his new-born hope.

"There is much to be considered," he pointed out calmly. "Per'aps it is the duty—per'aps it would be better—that the Sir George Emmet, 'aving killed 'imself, should stay dead for the sake of those others 'e 'as wronged."

Emmet sank back on his elbows and looked up at the tall Frenchman. For the first time M. Cuvelier noticed the firm line of the man's jaw, the fighting light in his eyes, the air of command and authority which marked him now. The challenging suggestion was taken up with a directness and resolution which would have been utterly foreign to Louis Kingsclere.

"I see what you mean—and in the circumstances it's decent of you to say it—but that's out of the question. I'm going back. I must. No matter

what's happened it can be straightened out, and must be. That's my job, part of the price I must pay for having tried to run away from life. It's got to be straightened up regardless of me in the best way for her and the youngsters. Damn it all, Cuvelier, there's not much religion about me, but, even apart from anything else, don't you see I owe it to Evan Jones? If there's a God or anything up there"—he jerked his head towards the remote stars—"Evan Jones's death bought me my chance to go back and carry on with my job. Don't you see that's one of the things he died for?"

M. Cuvelier saw that; he was seeing many things which made his head whirl. Among them was the thought of what a changeling, what a stranger, this man would be when he returned to his English life —how much wiser and deeper and wider—how haunted and influenced by the experiences and knowledge which had come to him in the life of Louis Kingsclere. What would the society of Sir George Emmet's world think of the stranger who returned to it under his name and title? And while these ideas flashed through his busy mind he was appreciating, also, that the influence of little Evan Jones, crucified, would extend further than he had ever dreamed, across the oceans, altering the destinies of unknown men and women. And they had never heeded Evan Jones when, in life, he sat with them on Li-Goon's veranda.

"You are right, monsieur," he remarked. "There is so much in the situation that one cannot grasp it all at once. But you are right! . . . The Evan Jones —I knew 'is death was beautiful—that it was fulfil-

ment for that poor mocked creature of the visions and the prayers. Life means so little for any of us —and it meant less for 'im. At last 'e 'as the success!—at last 'e achieves! 'E died for an illusion, yes. But for what else do we all live and die? We, monsieur, you and I, 'ave been through 'ell together for the illusion of love for a woman. We must all 'ave illusions. Destiny knows that. Why, otherwise, should the dolls dance? And the Evan Jones, crucified for his illusion—'e dies content. Who says 'is death is to be deplored? 'E must 'ave died, and ten, twenty, thirty years more of Netherlandia —would that 'ave compensated 'im for missing the magnificence of 'is death? By 'is mad faith already 'e 'as brought one man to resurrection—a man born far away and dead four years. Is that nothing? Assuredly, 'e 'ad the gift of faith and so 'e was in a sense a god. And your Destiny, your God—'e could not 'ave seen the little Evan Jones there without 'e wept for 'im. I, Paul Cuvelier, say that, and so, you see, 'e 'as done something for me, also." He turned and walked back to his place. "I am no god, but a mere maggot," he said to the night, "but I 'ave wept for 'im. Surely, then, there is reward for 'im."

He sat down on the log and they meditated again, wrapped in loneliness and darkness. The fire was almost out and the stars had drawn nearer.

"And so you go back to your England?"

Emmet nodded.

"What, then, of Leila?"

Emmet held out open, empty hands, then dropped them on his knees.

"I've got to decide that," he said. "I can't clear up everything all at once. Think of all I've got in my mind—Mary, Peter and Marykin—Oh, God!" He rocked. "Mary, Peter and Marykin," he repeated, his voice breaking. "They're so real to me. I feel as if I'd only just left them—as if I'd gone on a holiday and would be at home with them to-morrow with everything as it used to be. They belong to me; I belong to them."

"And, Leila, of course, is the woman of a dream," said M. Cuvelier, as if that meant nothing to him.

"Of a dream! I didn't marry her, nor did she marry me. She married Louis Kingsclere and he's dead back there in that burned up village—as dead as Evan Jones, as dead and gone as Analoolie. She's free as ever she was." He broke off. "She had such a grip on Louis Kingsclere, do you think——? It's easy to talk of her like this, so far away, so outside her influence, but——? I love Mary, you see." And he was afraid of Leila.

"Do not distress yourself," said M. Cuvelier. "You 'ave remembered. She will know before you speak."

"But she doesn't know that I've really ever forgotten."

"I wonder? . . . She will be a philosopher, monsieur. She, too, will remember. And there I enter. Marie is dead. That is just. I 'ave no right to marry a maid. I shall take the woman the maid became and consider myself lucky." His cupped fingers plucked his moustache, and the last of the firelight seemed to be gathered in his moist brown eyes. "One must accept things, monsieur. I 'ave

been brought at last to wisdom. I shall know 'er better now. I think of 'er as Leila, and as Leila I shall love 'er. I, too, 'ave been on a long journey. We shall be the most happy!"

He abandoned his illusion with good grace. It had cost him dear, and it was his nature to avoid effort. With Leila he would be so competent; with Marie he had been such a fool. Emmet, in the midst of his own trials, found nothing strange in his lack of concern at hearing Leila reduced to a lower category in M. Cuvelier's scale of affection. Peter would be five now, and Marykin seven.

The Frenchman rose and kicked the logs into a flame.

"Wait one moment!" he said.

He walked over to the strip of canvas and vanished beneath it to reappear with a flask and mugs.

"Cognac," he explained. "Cognac! It was in case of need. Some you 'ave 'ad already, but to-night we need it more." He filled the mugs. "We require sleep, monsieur, and we require a toast. I give it to you: to the sacred memory of Evan Jones, to the future, and to Destiny that 'as saved us from ourselves!"

The subsiding flames made him seem tall and dark and sardonic. Emmet had risen. The tin rims clinked together making a tiny sound in the empty night. They drank, gasping at the raw spirit. M. Cuvelier dashed his empty mug to the ground with the gesture of one shattering rarest crystal.

"Monsieur," he said, "I begin to realise that although all this"—he swept a long arm about at ranges, jungles and sky—"makes us appear smaller

than ants—maggots!—we are in truth the people of consequence in the eyes of Destiny!" He shrugged and his crooked smile flashed. "But, mind you, Sir George, this egotism, this optimism, may be due solely to the cognac," he added, dryly. "Now that death 'as raised up the little Evan Jones I find I am remembering words of 'is that I 'ave not been conscious of 'earing. It was a saying of 'is—that Evan Jones: 'and I saw vanity under the sun.' " He wiped his moustache and nodded meditatively to himself. "Vanity under the sun! . . ." he repeated, turning away towards the tent and rest.

CHAPTER XXI

The summit came abruptly, sharply, like the top of a wall. They stood panting upon the narrow crest and peered through the leaves. Beyond lay blueness —undulating, hazy, shimmering—which stretched away and away to meet the blue and hazy sky.

"The sea——!" they said.

Their pilgrimage was over. The sight of that wide, open expanse brought an infinite sense of relief and escape. They had been burrowing, like moles, in green depths; they had returned to the surface, emerging into the world where their fellows dwelt and where the ordinary facts of life prevailed. They filled their lungs with this familiar and wholesome air.

"The sea——!" they said.

Their thoughts went out beyond Netherlandia. Across that open road the ships came and went to the countries which were Home. Behind them brooded the leagues of the dark island, but they were done with all that. Their backs were turned upon the ranges, and upon the strange and terrible events in which they had been involved. Already the spells had lifted and the memories they had brought back were losing their sharpness. They had been puppets in a fantastic drama staged in those hidden depths of green, but now they had become men again. Their shoulders moved slightly, they stood at ease as if freed at last from a heavy burden. Satisfaction was expressed vocally by their followers, who jabbered

together, clapped their hands and chuckled jubilantly.

M. Cuvelier broke the hush which had come upon the two white men.

"Ah, 'ow 'ealing, 'ow blessed!" he sighed. "So very often in those days of ours I 'ave felt that we 'ave been living in the dream but that it was ended and I 'ad at last awakened. I 'ad not. I know now that it was all the dream, and *this* only the awakening!"

His hands swept out towards wide sky and sea.

"Yes, a dream," the other agreed. "I, too——!"

He spoke from afar, and his voice trailed off. His eyes looked out to the horizon with eager intentness; his keen, long face had in it a look of questing. M. Cuvelier, glancing at his companion, was reminded of a bird poised for a second before launching out into the freedom of that void.

"You're sure, Cuvelier?"

The Frenchman smiled. This man who had had no past had no present now. He was living only in the future, thinking only of the future. The return to Netherlandia meant nothing to him save a stage accomplished in the long journey he had to make across the world and across the years. In his imagination he had soared on, leaving the outpost far behind, letting it drop back into the oblivion which had encompassed Louis Kingsclere, his life and his love.

"Alas, I am sure of nothing!"

Emmet made an impatient gesture.

"You said you were sure the *Geervliet* would be in two days from now."

"Ah, yes, of that I am sure—as sure as one can be of anything."

But Emmet was not listening.

"Two days——!" he said aloud, communing with himself. He was appalled by such a dead blank of time. "Yes, it will be better to wireless Hambledon first. It would not do to stun her with such news. But Hambledon is equal to anything. He can prepare her for it gradually, and wire me at once to Batavia how things stand. Yes, I'll tell him to do that. It should be there by the time I arrive. God, I wonder what I'll hear? Four years is such a hell of a time—such a hell of a time! . . ."

All that could happen in four years while a man was dead! He spoke no more, but the thoughts went on, lining his face, clouding his eyes.

In M. Cuvelier there had been aroused such an artistic appreciation of this spectacle of a personality coming to resurrection that his own affairs had long been thrust into the background. Even now when he was about to meet Leila again—a wiser Paul meeting a free Leila—he was preoccupied with Emmet whom he had hoped to see die but whom he had seen born again. The truth was that the rôle of lover did not come naturally to M. Cuvelier. He had lived too long without love and his interest in life's complexities had taken the place of sexual and emotional excitement. Without knowing it he had become an impotent amateur in analysis, a watcher of the human game.

"And so," he said, "new lives for old is not the solution of it all? You are glad to be going back?"

"Ah!" breathed Emmet, and then: "Come on. We mustn't be wasting time here. Let's get it over."

He plunged forward down the slope, taking the lead which had been M. Cuvelier's—a man eager to be done with a distasteful business. M. Cuvelier followed, smiling in anticipation of what awaited them as he recollected Emmet's words.

"Yes, it is astonishing," he had admitted in answer to M. Cuvelier's leading questions. "She's the most remarkable woman I have ever met. Beside her Mary is a mere doll. I can see that; I admit it. And yet the fact is that I no more love her now than I did before we ever met. I'm not even sorry for her. I suppose it's shockingly selfish, but I've no sense of shame or guilt. It's just as if I were going to break my news to a stranger. I can't make anything of it! —Nothing at all!"

But M. Cuvelier had been able to make a lot of it. He saw that Louis Kingsclere had been an exotic plant for whom Leila was the right mate, but that Sir George Emmet, of London, was a plain business-man who had married Mary and had two children whom he called Peter and Marykin. Emmet would have run from Leila; Kingsclere from Mary. That was the whole thing in a nutshell, M. Cuvelier had discovered, but the discovery did not blunt his appetite for the scene in which Leila would find herself overthrown by the mystery of another personality in the same shell, even as she had overthrown him by her witchcraft with Marie. The love he was bringing back for Leila was different from the love he had offered Marie. It would not

interfere with his enjoyment. His face puckered in cynical amusement.

Thy had decided not to descend to Netherlandia, but to skirt around it on the crests of the lower hills to Gryndheim's house. As they went the bay opened out gradually in a great sheet which appeared to be canted up to meet the higher sea. Their field of vision grew towards them until they saw the brig *Hirondelle* at anchor, a match stick embedded firmly in the blue-green glass. Then the black beach appeared, the narrow strip of Wilhelminastraat and the oblong of the roofs. Smoke stole up. The leaves shut in again.

Their steps quickened. The return ceased to be an abstraction. They realised that within a few minutes they would be face to face with Leila—serene and quiet, giving them no help in the breaking of their news, making no comment, listening. Excitement gripped them. Beads of sweat appeared on Emmet's brow, and M. Cuvelier's fingers were restless. But they did not speak. They were busy framing speeches for that veranda, and distressed by the knowledge that the speeches they prepared would be useless.

A turn in the ridge brought them out into the presence of the full sweep of the sea. The bush grew less thick, allowing the sunshine to stream in and make patterns of black and gold. The murmur of the waves on the shore came up. Pigeons rose with a clatter of wings in the last valley. It was in this valley that Louis Kingsclere had been shooting on an evening long ago. The last ascent was made. They moved among the regular battalions of palms

which Gryndheim had planted against van Rossen's retirement.

Solid and real against the blue of the sky the square side of the house rose. Emmet stared at it. In that house Louis Kingsclere had lived with Leila! . . . Leila was still there, and he was now the bearer of strange tidings. He returned to that house to tell her that Louis Kingsclere was dead. His face twitched. It was all over. He was going back again—going back to Mary and Peter and Marykin. He tried to concentrate on that, but he was tormented by memories of the life within a life which he had lived. The secret bread he had eaten and which he would eat no more! He saw the life of Louis Kingsclere through its changing scenes and interests as a real life, complete, fantastic, colourful and apart. A man had been born aboard the *Mithridates* and had died in Analoolie's village. He had experienced, seen, loved, suffered and had his joys, and Death had come to him, as it came to all men. And what would his death mean to the woman he had held in his arms, but whom he had never understood?

Kingsclere could not have answered that question. Much less could the great Sir George Emmet. He gave it up, and sought refuge in the mundane facts of his own lot. The doctors had sent Emmet away for a change. He had had it. He returned now to his managing director's desk, a wiser man for the insight he had had into another's life and yet the same. He clung to that. While they passed through the garden of those old days he thought of Hambledon, smooth and efficient and with sawdust instead of blood in his veins, of Miss Smith, his secretary, of

the office and the works and the boardrooms. He strained his ears to hear the rattle of the typewriters and the roar of machinery at work for Emmet & Son, Ltd. Only thus could he rise above the associations awakened by that garden which had been Eden in another existence.

At a word from M. Cuvelier the boys fled noisily towards the back of the house. They rejoiced; for them the pilgrimage was over. But the two white men were not finished with it yet. They mounted the steps to the veranda, and paused there, uncertain, afraid, nervous, like strangers come upon a distressing mission. M. Cuvelier remembered an earlier occasion when he had deplored the absence of bell or knocker to make his presence known. They paused, hands hanging idle—the new lover and Mary's husband. The place was quiet in the hush of noon. The vines were still; the palms were still; the interior of the house was shadowy and silent.

"Would it not be better that I leave you at first?" whispered M. Cuvelier, like a conspirator.

"No—stay!" said Emmet, and, raising his voice, called: "Leila!"

The name quivered in the air, making a strained, wrung sound. They waited expectant, imagining her suddenly disturbed and doubtful whether she had heard or not, looking up from some task on which she was engaged, head poised, attentive but not surprised.

"Leila——!" The cry appealed to her to end their suspense. M. Cuvelier's lips re-echoed it without sound. They were twins in the emotion of the moment.

But there was no answer. Their ears strained in vain for her steady, musical voice.

"Per'aps, after all, she 'as gone to stay with the missionary," M. Cuvelier suggested on the same hushed note.

"She said she wouldn't."

A movement in the house warned them. They braced themselves. The reed curtain before them was drawn aside, but instead of Leila a boy appeared, his eyes round, his face smeared with ashes. He fell into a crouching attitude at their feet.

"Where sinabada stop along?"

"Sinabada no stop along," he intoned fearfully. "No stop along—go little time—stop along *Yondel*. No come back. Stop away plenty too much!"

They listened blankly. The meaning of the words took shape. Emmet gripped the boy's shoulders and wrenched him to his feet in an unreasoning paroxysm of anger and dismay. The boy quailed and went dumb. Emmet shook him to and fro, but when he had terrified him back to speech all they heard was a reiteration of his news: his mistress had gone, had just gone, had gone down to the *Hirondelle* and would return no more.

Emmet flung the boy aside, and, without a word, turned and sprang down the steps. M. Cuvelier ran after him. Neither knew what drove them. Too surprised for thought, they fled from that deserted house, and down the steep funnel of the path, forgetting everything save this crowning mystery into which Leila had been transformed. She had ceased to be a woman. She was a conundrum the solution of which was vital.

They emerged into Wilhelminastraat running like men pursued rather than pursuing. Brown idlers gaped; the sand spurted from their worn boots. Between the jetty and the brig a boat moved, its oars glinting in diamond flashes.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!" Emmet shouted.

M. Cuvelier took up the cry. The natives broke into clamour and flung up their arms like marionettes jerked on wires. Dogs barked. The two men raced on as if for their lives. M. Cuvelier had no respite in which to remind himself that he understood Leila at last and could love her as an equal, nor had Emmet to realise the fact that Leila was a widow.

The boat stopped, hesitated, and began to creep back. But when they reached the end of the jetty the two men—faces flushed, pulses hammering, unbalanced by exertion and agitation—found that she had not returned. She lay about fifteen yards off, at rest, her reflection steady in the cool green water, the Malay crew leaning on their dripping oars. They came to an abrupt halt, gaping down and out at the boat and her occupants. In the stern sat Mr. Carrington, his mulish face turned without interest towards the jetty. On the near thwart, Pedro, smart as ever, was screwing his head round. His gold-framed teeth flashed. Leila and Mat Bradley were opposite him.

She had not changed. They seemed to have been away so long, and they had suffered such complete transformation, but they had returned to find—Leila. She considered them with her tranquil smile. Even her costume was that in which they had always seen her—the white, plain dress which enclosed rather than clad her. The repose of her attitude—

bare elbows resting on the gunwale, hands loose—expressed complete calm. No hint of perturbation marred her loveliness. The moment might have been the most ordinary in an ordinary day. Her quiet mocked them, but she did not, for she was content to watch them out of her inviolable sanctuary.

Mat Bradley, however, mocked them with bold eyes, which, even in triumph, were vigilant, as they would have been in a circus ring with animals which though broken might turn and spring.

They did not notice Mat Bradley.

Stillness filled the glass-floored basin of Netherlandia Bay. Above the sky was cloudless and empty. The waters were dumb, and no bird called nor was there any motion in palms or trees. The *Hirondelle* slept at her sagging hawser. And there lay the whaleboat which was taking Leila away. For a long minute the scene remained so, static, voiceless, like a painted picture.

Then Leila's deep lips parted, and her words came stealing to them across the space of water.

"So you have come back—both of you. I had not expected that. I'm sorry now we didn't get away. Never to have known would have been the acme of tantalisation. Just think of it!—never to have known! To have guessed this or that, but never to have known!" With complete aloofness she had weighed the position and deplored an unhappy mistake.

Together, as if her voice had freed them, they held out their hands and said: "Leila——!" in appeal, though neither knew what he sought from her.

She continued to smile gravely.

"Yes," she went on with the slightest nod, "I am going away with Mat." She paused and then, with an air of simple candour, resumed: "After all we may as well be frank. The time has passed when it matters whether we keep our secrets. Yes, it would have been wiser to have gone as I planned, but when I saw you both it was too late. It was just as well to wait then and say adieu. You were in such a desperate hurry." They were made aware of their heat and their dishevelled condition; they saw the folly of their haste. "Well, I am going away with Mat. He'll try to hurt me, try to break me, but that doesn't matter. It will even be interesting. He has already bullied me handsomely in your absence. Behold the result! But I'm afraid I'm only pretending to be afraid of him." Again she paused, and now her head was turned away from them and they saw her chiselled profile while her cool gaze rested appraisingly on the man beside her as if he were deaf and dumb and blind, as if he were no more than a huge doll with which she played.

Under that reflective scrutiny Mat Bradley shifted uneasily and clenched his fists. But he did nothing to end it, was defeated by it. They saw that the ringmaster was enslaved. The fact awakened neither sympathy nor satisfaction. They were too absorbed. Pedro, the simpleton, was amused, however. He spluttered in childish mirth. Mat Bradley's foot shot out and savagely hacked his charge's ankle.

"Quit that, you!" There was the snap of the whip again.

Pedro, the prize-fighter, cowered.

The demonstration did not impress Leila. She returned to the men on the jetty.

"I am going away with him not on account of anything in him, but because of what is in me," she explained. "I am the victim of an insatiable appetite for adventure and sensations. I am an adventuress —a real adventuress and not in the perverted sense of the word, for I shall get nothing from him, but kicks and ill-treatment and——"

"Here, Lee, that's enough of that!" Mat Bradley broke out in stormy protest, but his voice was different now for he had an animal in the ring which did not fear his whip.

"——and bullying cowardice until I leave him," she went on, as if there had been no interruption. "But he is new; he is different. In his heavy way he will be an adventure, and that is my need. You, of course, were an adventure, Louis, and quite a good one, until I found you out!" But in naming the dead she had reminded Emmet. Like one hypnotised he had been dominated by her, and had not been able to comprehend that the only real significance in all this was that he was free. He smiled at her now, defiantly. She was going on, beyond the range of his mirth as she was beyond the range of Mat Bradley's attempt to domineer. "That's the trouble with being a woman: when a man's in love with you you can't help finding him out. I believe I tried not to, because we were happy. But it was inevitable, and when I had seen through you life grew dull. The goodness, the peace, lacked the dash of salt which had made it palatable and which was essential."

Her thoughtful eyes asked—without caring about

any answer he might make—whether this was not reasonable enough.

But she was no longer dealing with Louis Kingsclere.

"What was the secret then?" Emmet challenged sullenly, aggrieved that she should have been cleverer than the man he had made.

"My dear, be content! Am I not telling you some of my secrets at last? You cannot expect me to tell you your own. The *Hirondelle* must sail to-day." The defiance in his eyes did not stir her, and when her glance was directed to M. Cuvelier he could not congratulate himself on a victory. She had finished with him—that was all.

"And you, Paul—you had only the past as I had only the present. For a time studying you and turning you on the spit afforded relaxation, but it would not have lasted. You offered the love of a child, and a child's love has such dreadful limitations. You started with the wrong foot forward, Paul. Too late you made love as a child to Marie who was dead. And you a Frenchman, yet so inept!" She shook her head in reproach, while M. Cuvelier felt the stab of her contempt.

"But no——!" he cried bitterly. He had an answer for her now; he was her match. There was so much he had to say. But he did not say it. Suddenly he had realised that all his new wisdom was useless. In spite of everything he still desired Leila, but it was too late. She had moved on from him, taking, as tribute, the memory of Marie. To contend against her was vain. With a flutter of his hands he resigned himself to his lot as a spectator.

She addressed them both again.

"There it was then. The interlude was over, and I have only one life. But a climax was needed. What more artistic than to send you both away on such a noble mission knowing that in all probability only one would return? And which ever did would find Leila gone—no reward, no prize, not even an explanation!" Her eyes were like the shadows of darkened stars, without light, cold. She folded her hands on her lap with an Oriental air of finality. "Admit that it was a triumph of artistry," she said, and critically: "—marred a little, undoubtedly, by failure to leave it crisply, cleanly, as I intended. I should have known you would fail me and seen to it that I could never be certain." She breathed a tiny sigh over her only blunder.

"In the name of God are we going to sit here in the sun all day, Mr. Carrington?" Mat Bradley demanded furiously. Consternation was in him, and it was not the sun which had flushed his face and set the veins in his neck throbbing.

"No," said Mr. Carrington laconically, and to the crew: "Pull!"

The bronze statues started into life. Oars dipped and flashed.

"I shall at least see Pedro's big fight in Sydney," Leila remarked. "We catch the Australian boat at Rabaul. Pedro should fight well. And now—good-bye, husband! Good-bye, sweetheart!" She raised her hand in serene farwell.

They were roused to make a final desperate effort.

"I was never your husband!" Emmet shouted, swept by a quick gust of anger.

"No?" Leila answered carelessly. "Then you have remembered?"

"Nor I your lover——!" averred M. Cuvelier wretchedly.

"No?" said Leila. "Then you have forgotten?"

The words came thinned by distance. The boat crept away. Mr. Carrington did not look back, Mat Bradley's glance was fixed on the bottom-boards where he seemed to read some distasteful lesson, Leila looked towards the *Hirondelle* which waited in readiness to take her on to new experiences. Only Pedro continued to gaze back with meaningless devotion in his doglike eyes.

The boat went on, showing the two men a sharp stern. The sun beat down hotly. They remained transfixed, waiting for something to happen. But nothing happened. Nothing was going to happen.

M. Cuvelier recognised that first. He slapped his thigh and broke into a peal of chagrined yet deeply appreciative laughter.

"Oh, perfect! perfect!" he declared, his face aglow with animation. "We each 'ad the answer to 'er that gave us the last laugh, but she was able to brush them away and go in triumph. What an exit! What a woman!" He seized Emmet's hands and pumped them up and down like an excited boy. "Congratulations, monsieur. Congratulations, George! We complete our journey marvellous and perilous. We emerge unscathed. You might 'ave killed me—I might 'ave killed you—for the love of 'er—that Leila! Congratulations! We are both alive and free. Truly we are people of consequence in the eyes of Destiny—but what a woman!"

His mood was contagious. Emmet shook his hands with equal warmth and laughed with him. But a cloud passed over his face as his own affairs—rather than those of Louis Kingsclere who was dead—surged back into his mind.

"I say," he questioned anxiously, " it wouldn't have been quicker if I'd caught the *Hirondelle* and gone round that way, would it?"

"Ah, the bells of 'ell!" gasped M. Cuvelier, "these English——!"

A gesture alone could express his feelings. He snatched his hands away and flung them up to heaven in admiration and ironical appeal.

THE END